

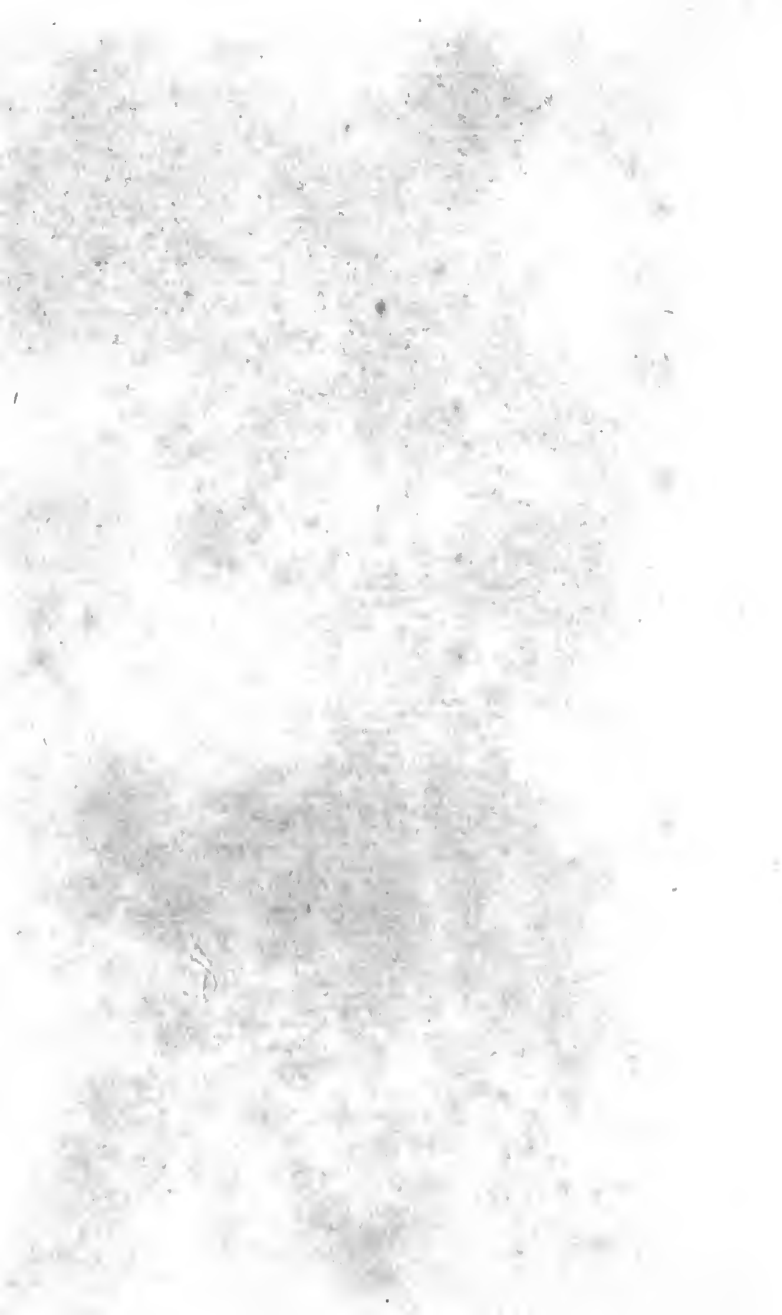
IN THE  
FIRST WATCH

JAMES DALZIEL



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IN THE FIRST WATCH



# IN THE FIRST WATCH

AND

OTHER ENGINE-ROOM STORIES

By

JAMES DALZIEL

*"As I can, not as I wish."*—JAN VAN EYCK

SECOND IMPRESSION

LONDON

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## IN THE FIRST WATCH

ON the capacity, the character, the caprice of the master depends the comfort of the ship's company, to-day even as in the days of sail. Thus no man has been in command for six months but he is known of all men in the employ. Then is he given a label, and that label he wears till the act of God, or the will of the owners, removes him to another sphere. In grades of goodness he is "just so so," or "one of the best," or "a real white man"; in degrees of badness he is "one of the shareholders," or "poor as they make 'em," or a "pukka pariah." If he is extra eminently popular, or the reverse, he is invested with a nickname. To Captain Julius Hardin the officers and engineers of the Celestial Coasting Company awarded the name of our Lord's betrayer.

For five years he held command, and for

five years he was the best hated man of the China Coast community. The number of mates he was the means of passing out of the employ was beyond account; and even of engineers—though these, by the polity of the modern steamship, are not so utterly abandoned to the master's aberrations—he had scalps not a few. After all those years extraordinary legends of his consistent tyranny are still current “gup”; and, indeed, the manner of his departure ensured that the name of Captain “Judas” Hardin would be remembered while the red ensign flies on sunrise seas.

By nice computation I make it he was no underbred deep-sea bully, nor yet the overdone autocrat of the quarter-deck; but only an exceptionally gifted man, without fear or moral sense whatever, finding his life's amusement, and food for a devilish humour, in searching out, and probing, and scarifying the very cores of the weaknesses of his fellow-men.

Towards the end so notorious was he that only officers and engineers on their “last chance”—that is men discarded from other ships of the Company, but granted one last opportunity to redeem themselves in the

superintendent's eyes — could be induced to sign articles on the *Tonkin*; and they were given to being left behind sick of sudden maladies in out-port hospitals, or even to severing their connection with the employ, if trade was brisk and shipmen in request on the Coast.

That the *Tonkin* could go her rounds for years bearing such a stigma without the censure of the owners descending on the master may well appear incredible. But the C.C.C., like many of our vast colonial enterprises, has its being for the benefit of a small group of capitalists in the homeland — very estimable persons in this case, I believe, of the Presbyterian persuasion, with philanthropic leanings. In the East, the managers, nay, even the venerated Tai-pans, are merely hired servants; and the personal element is not allowed to affect the conduct of the concern. The employee is a part of the machine; if he cannot work in accord with his immediate superior he is a cog out of gear, and must go. Captain Hardin was a capable ship-master; that was all the Tai-pan, his mind bent on charters, and freightage, and insurance, and the keeping of a fleet of half a hundred

steamers everlastingly on the move, knew, or cared to know.

So the master of the *Tonkin* went his way, none daring to oppose him. Even the hardest of "hard cases" became as lambs when under the cold grey eye of "Judas." True it is that a specially tough specimen, fired with drink and the tall talk of his fellows, ventured to assert himself; but the result was not such as to raise hopes that the pastime would ever become popular; for Hardin, quick and able of body as of mind, laid out the whisky-fied bravo scientifically before he had well got his hands up, and then administered a hammering that qualified him for hospital, his certificates quite numerous bruises, each placed to a nicety, and the discriminating admiration of the house surgeon. And not again did revolt raise its head on the "little hell afloat" that men called the *Tonkin*.

Such was the state of affairs aboard when William Banns signed on as chief engineer. His predecessor had been a tough Greenockian, a lifelong teetotaler, and an impeccable shipman, and so absolved of all the master's ill-will except his sardonic humours, and it had taken four years of constant nagging to drive

him out of the ship. But when Hardin clapped eyes on William Banns how his heart must have rejoiced; for William Banns had "harmless" writ large all over him. And "Judas" knew his story; and that he was as one delivered bound into his hands.

For of late William Banns had tried the patience of his employers to the utmost; indeed, only the fifteen years of service he had to his name had saved him from dismissal. He had been cautioned; he had been transferred; he had been suspended—all to no purpose; and now the superintendent had appointed him to the *Tonkin* on the clear understanding that if he was reported again he would be discharged. For quiet-spoken, good-natured William Banns was the most hopeless kind of a dipsomaniac—the man that drinks in secret. However, the straight but friendly words of the superintendent had impressed him with the gravity of his position; and he stepped aboard the *Tonkin* an avowed teetotaler, and determined to regain his character in the employ. And he had need; for William Banns had a wife and little children in Shanghai.

With any other skipper but Hardin he

might have succeeded. But to be shipmates with "Judas," to be exposed day and night to his infernal pleasantries, to be ever guarding your temper and your tongue, to turn to his quips and gibes at all times the hide of a rhinoceros, required a temperament phlegmatic, well-balanced, and under sure control; and poor Banns had only his good intention.

The *Tonkin* got underweigh; and she was barely clear of the wharf when Banns had word that the skipper wanted him on the bridge. Banns, as was but natural on leaving the engine-room, stayed a moment to wash his hands and change his jacket.

"Where have you been, sir? Do you think I've nothing to do but wait your pleasure?" was the broadside he received as he hurried up the ladder.

Banns mumbled an excuse.

"None of that, sir. I'll have no back talk on my ship."

Banns was speechless.

"I sent for you to warn you that I was not pleased with the way the engines were handled when leaving the wharf. When I ring 'Full astern' I mean 'Full astern,' and I know what these engines can do—and don't you

forget it! Try none of your tricks on me, Mr Banns, or you'll only be sorry once. And I'll have no drinking aboard my ship. You see I know you, sir; I know you by repute. You may go, sir." And "Judas" sped the wholly dazed Mr Banns down the ladder with a glance of his cold, envenomed eye.

Now Banns knew that the engines had been started and stopped as exactly as was humanly possible, and his state of mind may be conceived. So the mate on the bridge was able to report to the ship's company that "Judas" had been "down on the new chief like a hundred of bricks already."

Banns came off watch at midnight, and was just comfortably into his first sleep when he was roused out to the skipper's order. He was told that the engines were not making the usual revolutions, and threatened with being reported for inefficiency. Willing to do anything to gain the skipper's good opinion at the outset, Banns opened the expansion to the full; and then turned in, wondering what the superintendent would say when he saw the coal account for the voyage. An hour later he was again summoned to the bridge, to be told that there was too much

noise in the stokehold, and that if he could not keep his men under better control there were others ready to attempt it. Not so much as the clang of a shovel must be heard at night on the *Tonkin*. So the hours that should have been his own to spend in well-earned slumber Banns passed in the red-hot stokehold trying to compass the impossible.

That was the first of many nights Banns passed in like misery on the *Tonkin*. It may be thought that the master was putting himself to unbelievable inconvenience to annoy the engineer, but it was not so; the exigencies of the coasting trade may require the master to be on the bridge at any hour of the night. So as surely as "Judas" was "called" to alter the course, or when making a light, or because of fog, or for any of half a hundred seaman's reasons, so surely did he send for, and browbeat and insult on some trumpery charge, the unfortunate Banns.

But it was by day and in port that Banns felt his position most; for then his tormentor always took care that a Customs officer, or a stevedore, or some other longshoreman was within earshot when he treated him to a



reprimand; and these, not knowing the very sufficient reasons that encouraged Banns to endure in silence, took no trouble to hide their contempt for the man who could take such abuse meekly. And Banns was no coward; nor unfortunately was he philosopher enough to relegate the master's splenetic fits to their proper category.

At the end of a month Hardin had Banns reduced to a state aptly described by his ship-mates when they said: "He couldn't call his soul his own." Not that he received, or indeed expected, much sympathy, since the very fact that Hardin devoted himself so enthusiastically to his persecution ensured for the others the small measure of peace they had lately enjoyed. The only one who tried to hearten him was the mate, a big, kindly "Cousin Jack," with a weakness for strong drink—sternly repressed, of course, while on the *Tonkin*—and the saving grace of an elementary humour that enabled him to keep a stiff upper lip in the skipper's presence, looking to the time when, in the retirement of his cabin, he could take it out of a much-battered canvas dummy he addressed as "Judas." Of course, he voiced his con-

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dolence in such worn gags as: "Buck up, old chap, Judas won't live for ever"; or "Never mind, there's more ships than parish churches"; still, Banns was cheered by his rough optimism, and held by him, and completed his first voyage without having given the skipper a chance to report him. Then at Shanghai the mate was transferred to another ship.

But there was no transfer for Banns, nor any hopes of his persecutor relenting. For was he not an engineer? one of the "interlopers" on shipboard; tolerated only as fulfilling necessary duties, of which the seamen has no understanding; but always suspected of the awful sacrilege of aspiring to divide authority with the master. For such there could be no mercy; and Hardin played his pitiful game without apprehension for himself, or doubt as to the end.

What Banns suffered will never be known. Unfortunately he had but a limited play of feature, and, latterly, he had trained himself to meet the skipper's most inhuman gibe with a stolid countenance, a leaden eye. Certain it is that Hardin can have had no idea that his consistent nagging was affecting Banns

as it did, or he would never have gone to such lengths. He was far too clever to risk driving any man to desperation. It was whispered after that Banns had talked of doing away with himself; but always one thought deterred him. In case of suicide his family would not benefit from his insurance policy, and Banns had little else to leave them. In his misery the temptation to find solace in drink appealed to him with tenfold force. But Banns held out; he knew that if he once tasted he was lost. So the *Tonkin* coasted from port to port, till in time she came to Swatow. And at Swatow Banns was handed a bunch of telegrams that told him that his eldest child and only son, a bright boy of eight, had been sick of a fever, and had died, and was buried.

The *Tonkin* sailed again at sundown; threaded the contracted, rock-ringed Sugar-Loaf Pass in the crimson glory of the after-glow; and, heading up the Formosa Channel, ran into the gleaming dark of a starlit night and a fresh monsoon. The mate relieved the bridge at eight; by this time the Lamocks Light was winking broad on the port-bow. The second gave him the course, growled a "Good-night," and left him to the darkness, his duty, and his dreams.

Even in that latitude the night wind has a bite in it, and he buttoned up his jacket and sunk his hands in his pockets, preparatory to starting his four hours' tramp from end to end of the narrow structure. The night was the seaman's favourite — "dark but clear." The sea was dead ahead, and the shadowy hull beneath him flung up to the stars, and down again swishing into the black waters with sickening swing and regularity. The monsoon thrummed the scanty wire rigging. The stokehold ventilators, gaping just behind, carried to him from far below the tinkle of fire shovels, the clang of a closing furnace door. The big, black roundness of the funnel sang and vibrated to the fierce draught within. About him was a sense of power, of security, of progression. A mild, unwinking planet, wading through the scud, looked down on him betimes, and spoke of love and peace. A travelling huddle of lights away on the starboard hand—a mail-boat, he judged—told he was not alone on this wind-swept sea.

To him, then, on the solitude of the flying bridge came the sound of voices raised in fierce contention directly beneath him. First, the skipper's strong, raw-edged, sarcastic

tones; then, to his astonishment, a voice, high, out of control, pitifully inarticulate from rage, giving back word for word. "My God! the skipper and the chief—and hard at it!" cried the mate, and sped out to the end of the bridge; from whence, himself unseen, he could see as well as hear this unheard-of phenomenon. The captain's cabin was immediately under the bridge; Banns stood fair in the light from the door, and it was soon plain to the mate that he had been drinking. And when Hardin recovered from the surprise he had received when the worm turned he noticed it also, and cut short what had promised to be an entertaining altercation with the words: "You're drunk, sir. I'll deal with you to-morrow."

To-day the watcher swears that in that moment he saw Banns struck pale, and speechless — and sober. Thus for a space he remained, his jaw dropped, staring at nothingness. Then he lurched, and would have fallen had he not clung to the cabin door-post. Finally, he staggered off aft along the bridge deck, groping his way and uncertain—seeming as a sleep-walker awakened in the act of his uncanny excursion.

The mate resumed his tramp ; he concluded the entertainment was over for the night. At four bells the skipper's light went out ; the mate inferred that "Judas" had a surfeit of wrangling for the time being, and that he himself was to experience the hitherto unknown luxury of a whole watch in peace. The night remained clear, the ship made fair progress : all was well on the *Tonkin*. The man on watch thought of many things, but chiefly of Banns, the dipsomaniac, and his pitiful fight with self ; of Banns, the father, who in his trial had sought consolation from his enemy ; of Banns—who would surely be discharged at the first port of call. Just before six bells it seemed to him he heard a movement in the skipper's cabin. He listened intently. For a time—nothing ; then a queer, choking moan, and a long-drawn sigh, such as a man might give who sleeps unrestfully. Then again—silence. The ship drove on. He resumed his march. Seven bells. Another half-hour, and his watch was over.

One bell. And almost on the stroke a shriek, deathly, despairing, horrible. Oh, spirits of the night, the sea ! What was that ? Was it from aboard the ship, or from some-

where in the dark beyond? In every sense of his being he knew it for the death-cry; he did not look to have it repeated; but—was there to be nothing more? Ah!—now he felt the engines drawing up; there—they had stopped with a quiver and a jar. Now he thought he knew.

A minute—two minutes—and he was just going to call the skipper when the machinery moved again. Five minutes later he heard the voice of the second engineer at the foot of the ladder.

“What was the trouble, Mac? Why did ye stop?” he asked, and went down.

“The chief——”

“Not dead?”

“We took him out of the crank-pit in three pieces. Oh, my God!” And he sobbed his heart out; he was little more than a boy.

“I’ll call the skipper,” said the mate; and stepped to the cabin door, and switched on the light. There in his bunk lay the master, his brains battered out on the pillow.

And while the two men stared horror-struck eight bells rang out sharp and sonorous on the empty night. “All’s well,” sang the man on the look-out.

## THE COMMODORE<sup>1</sup>

"START the light, John!" said the second engineer to the Chinese oiler. From a dark corner came the sizzle of escaping steam, the rapid pulsing of a high-speed engine, the hum of a dynamo; then all about the engine-room incandescent lights flamed into being, turning what had been a cavern gloomy as the halls of Erebus into an abode of cheerfulness and scintillating light. On the two great, polished, ponderously-hurrying cranks fell the blue radiance, to be shot at every revolution against the varnished yellow walls in solid silver bars. With like regularity the beams caught the slow-swinging connecting rods, to add their flashing reflections to the moving tangle of light. On the many-armed, mysterious-moving valve-gear, on the golden pump-rods working in and out of their white and shining covers, on the links that see-sawed

<sup>1</sup> The Author thanks the Editor of *London Opinion* and *To-Day* for permission to reprint "The Commodore."



solemnly on the low-pressure engine, on the insignificant "indicator" fittings—the engineer's stethoscope, by means of which he looks into the very seething heart of his charge!—not a piece of the great, patient, reliable entity toiling there but caught its share of the glory, and woke on the instant to renewed effort. But the pride of the *Mandarin's* machinery department, all of polished steel, and burnished brass, and richest teak wood, was the little reversing engine on the starting platform, and beside this, the apple of his eye, stood the second engineer.

A long twenty years had passed since Dougald M'Guffie had first taken service with the Celestial Coasting Company, yet still he was but a junior, which alone sufficed to make him a man of mark on the China Coast, where climate, cholera, and the nameless luxuries of the "Gorgeous East" ensure promotion being fairly rapid. But the sorrowful fact was that poor Dougald, sober, hard-working, and splendid man of his hands as he was, lacked book-learning; even the little that the Board of Trade require from applicants for the certificate of first engineer. He had joined the *Mandarin* as fourth when she was a new

boat, the yacht of the C.C.C. fleet, the clipper of the Shanghai to Hong-Kong line. In three years he had risen to second, and in that position of necessity he stayed: the despair of all the young and up-to-date chiefs who in turn were supposed to be in charge of the *Mandarin's* machinery, the terror of every careless or incompetent third, but the guide, the teacher, the friend of every anxious youngster who aspired to a knowledge of the art of running marine engines, and was willing to acknowledge Dougald M'Guffie to be the Compleat Practical Engineer.

At first, when they realised that he was content with his subordinate position, his name had been a scoff among the engineers of the Company, and some facetious youth had nicknamed him "The Commodore"—the Commodore Second—and the title stuck.

About this time to Shanghai there came a new king to reign over the seventy engine-rooms of the C.C.C. fleet: a small, alert, unassuming man, with a repute in the engineering world that had travelled even to the roaring seaports of Eastern Asia, and who was to be known to the lay community as the "superintending engineer."

Now, shortly before he arrived a new chief had been appointed to the *Mandarin*, a young man on his first promotion, a young man with the very latest extra special certificate issued by the Board, a young man to whom the mysteries of the differential calculus and the theory of latent heat were no mysteries, but who had still a great deal to learn about the science of nursing engines in a head sea.

To the "super," then, came this young man full of trouble. He had found a lamentable lack of system in the *Mandarin's* engine department; indeed, no system at all that he could discover. The engines themselves appeared to be in good order; he had no complaint with them, but the way the work was carried on did not suit him at all. He had remonstrated with the second engineer, but to no effect; indeed, that gentleman had told him to his face that the system that had been good enough for his predecessors would have to be good enough for him; that he had run the *Mandarin's* engine-room as seemed fit to him before he (his superior officer) had left school, and that he proposed to run it in the same (luridly qualified) manner when he was dead; that the chief engineer's sole reason-to-

be on that particular ship was to play deck quoits with the lady passengers, and that the sooner he took himself out of his (the second's) engine-room, the sooner the work of the department would proceed. Then, in addition to being opiniated and unamenable to discipline, the man was old and slow, and behind the times, and, sorry as he was to say so, he would require another second engineer.

The Small Great Man listened without remark—to the complainant it seemed even sympathetically—to all the proceeding, but at the close he only said politely: “You have an extra certificate, Mr Crosshead, I understand?”

“I have, sir,” replied Crosshead, trying his best to look modest.

“Ah! does you credit, sir, great credit. A young man to be chief, too; not long promoted, are you?”

“Only six months, sir.”

“Well, go back to your ship, and—about the second—rest content—I will—er—make arrangements. Good-day.”

“A queer little man, that,” mused Mr Crosshead, as he went down the office stairs. “Now, why in thunder did he want to gas

about my 'ticket' and promotion when all I wanted was to get shot of that old nuisance, M'Guffie?"

That afternoon, at an hour when it was fairly certain that Mr Crosshead would be walking out his young wife in the Public Gardens, the dapper little steam-launch, sacred to the C.C.C. superintendent, discharged the Little Great Man on the *Mandarin's* gangway. Piloted by the second engineer, he descended into the heart of the ship, and, with memories of his own early sea-going days, and his first job as second crowding thick and vividly upon him, he took in all the inwardness of that engine-room. His expert grey eye noted the intricate stencilling on the bulkheads; the many little contrivances—save-oils, water-catches, and canvas screens for keeping the place clean when the engines were under weigh; the extra electrics—that he knew no firm of shore electricians ever thought of installing!—that made every out-of-the-way and apt-to-be-neglected corner light as day, but that showed up no sign of neglect, of corrosion in any of them. He saw the spare eccentric-rods hanging on the bulkhead, polished and ready for instant use, not painted

and slung into the bilges, as he knew was but too often their fate; he saw the patent tube-stopper packed and ready to do its direful duty in case of explosion, reposing on its pair of home-made brackets in the stokehold. All these and many other things he saw, and noted, and said no word.

"You've been a long time in this ship, Mr M'Guffie, I understand," he had remarked to his guide when they reached the bottom of the engine-room ladder; and before the old man quite realised what had happened, he was pouring all his story, all his sorrows, into the ear of the famous ex-University Professor of Engineering, late Board of Trade Surveyor, up-to-date scientist and all-powerful superintendent, of whom the younger men had confidently predicted that he would quickly send packing such antiquated mechanics as he.

So it happened that when the chief engineer boarded the *Mandarin* next morning there was waiting for him in the alley-way a tall, stout, bald-headed, white-whiskered man in dungaree overalls, visibly swollen with insolence and pride, who informed him that in his absence the "super" had visited the ship.

"Dear me! I wonder what he wanted? I'm

“sorry I wasn’t on board,” said the chief, in his best manner, with a view to impressing the adjacent deck officers.

“He wanted to see the engine-room. Ye were na missed,” his subordinate remarked, with studied calmness. “I showed him round, and I was to tell ye that ye had the cleanest engine-room in the fleet ; and he shook hands wi’ me—wi’ me, mind ye!—at the engine-room door—ay, an’ before a’ the ‘deck ornaments.’ He’s a gentleman—that’s *his* name. We could do wi’ a few more like him in the employ.”

That same forenoon Mr Crosshead received notice from the Office to transfer his services to a newer and larger ship, and, as it was a change in the nature of promotion, he had no grounds for complaint, even if the reason he gave himself for his transfer was not exactly flattering to one of his standing in the Company. And the Little Great Man, who never did things by halves, sent over M’Guffie a chief almost as old as himself, who desired to know as little as might be of what went on down below, but only to be left in peace to his pipe and his Glasgow weekly paper.

Nor did he rest there, for at the month’s end

M'Guffie received a pleasantly-worded intimation from his employers to the effect that, in recognition of his long services, his wages were increased by two pounds a month—that is to say, he would be paid two pounds more than any second in the employ. So from that day he was, in truth, “The Commodore”; and the name that had been bestowed in irony was become a title of respect by virtue of official recognition.

That was ten long years ago, and he was still “The Commodore,” still, to outward seeming, the same hale, stout, grizzled, active, and hard-bitten specimen he had been on the day he received his brevet rank. But of late the few who knew him well had noticed a change.

Two years ago his only remaining child, a governess in a missionary's family, had been burned to death, with her charges, in one of the sudden fanatical uprisings of the Chinese, at that time of frequent occurrence in the Yang-tse Valley. His friends—for uncouth, cantankerous as he was, all men who were men swore by him—said he was never his own man again.

He had never been a genial shipmate, but



within the last year he had developed fits of moroseness that scared even his intimates. For hours he would sit in his cabin, doing nothing, saying nothing, not even smoking, only sitting gazing with leaden, unseeing eyes at the white expanse of bulkhead in front of him. Also, he was troubled with headaches; and old Dr Bentley, who for thirty years had cajoled and cursed the full-blooded sea-going community of the China Coast along the uncongenial path of physical well-being, only shook his head when M'Guffie's name was mentioned.

His old shipmates did their duty by him according to local usage. They urged him to retire, to go "home"—the irony of the word to the man, old, alone in the world!—only to receive the answer they expected. "Na, na; what wad I do at hame? If I'm to die, I'll die where I'm a kennt man. There's mony a laddie on the Cheena Coast 'ill be proud to dump down his dollar when he kens it's for auld Dougald's tombstone. Gang hame! Not me!"

So the old man drew more and more into himself, and in his loneliness all his heart went out to the grand, faithful machine he tended, that reflected his care and devotion from

cylinder-cover to tail-end. But not only was he a man alone ; in these latter days his old sorrow had come back on him.

Thirty years ago he had come in from sea to find that his wife, the mother of his children, had left him for another man. Hot-foot, he had followed the couple across the weary Pacific, but what came of his quest none in the Far East ever knew. Now, during the long night-watches in the engine-room he lived again those terrible days when his tragedy was new, his wound green. Again he suffered the shame, the humiliation. Again he raged through the long month of that agonising ocean chase, when every day seemed a year, and the crack liner to stand still on the painted, mocking sea. At such times his deadly hate for the woman and her paramour flamed out on his old face as in his strong days he had never suffered it to do, and he cried aloud in his agony, while the astonished Chinese oiler on watch looked on from a far corner with round, fear-stricken eyes.

But to-night his mind was at rest ; a great peace had descended on him. There, in his white pants and gauze singlet, on the starting-platform he stood, a fine, upstanding figure for

all his sixty years. Betimes he hummed a tune, an old, old tune that took him back to his apprentice days and the grey Scots borough he would see never again. And ever the two great cranks in front of him with rhythmic beat drove the ship on through the black and brooding night.

Eight bells struck—the end of his watch—but brought no third engineer to relieve him of his duty. “Ah, the laddies, the laddies!” he muttered, shaking his old head. “He’ll be too busy mashin’ that snuff-and-butter lassie in the second class to think o’ auld Dougald. Well, well, ten minutes is neither here nor there. I was young myself once.” And a smile spread over his furrowed face, and again he was the young M’Guffie walking out his lass on the banks o’ the Dee.

But fearfully was his dream dispelled. The quick-pulsating, agonised quiver—once known never to be forgotten or misunderstood—of a ship taking the ground shook as with an earthquake shock the aged *Mandarin*. For one soul-sickening instant the vessel paused—a pause that sent M’Guffie staggering against the bulkhead, till, with a final lurch, she parted from the fatal reef and sped again on her way.

For a long minute the silence of the tomb held the stricken ship. Then far overhead broke out a dim - heard pandemonium. But the telegraph bell had clanged viciously against M'Guffie's very ear, and he had no thought but to carry out its behests. "Full astern," "Half astern," "Slow ahead," "Full ahead," "Stand by," all over the dial the pointer wandered—fair index of the state of mind of the man dragged from a sound sleep to face on the instant the most terrible crisis that our latter-day imaginations can conceive—a crowded ship sinking in a dark and stormy sea. At last the finger paused at "Stop," and M'Guffie brought the two great cranks to rest.

As he did so the two junior engineers shot down the ladder. The telegraph had rung. Let who would stand by the boats and life-buoys: unless otherwise ordered, their place was below; at least, until the unanswerable dial said, "Finished with engines." But M'Guffie wanted no assistance. "Up ye go, laddies, and look out for yourselves!" he cried, and waved them again to the ladder. "I misdoubt the 'old man' has ripped the bottom clean out of her."

To their credit, the two lads stood still,

the same thought plain to read on both their faces. "D'ye hear me? Up wi' ye!" the old man roared, fairly stamping on the plates between surprise and anger. If it was his last minute on earth, he would let them see who was second engineer on the *Mandarin*. A hurricane shout of "All hands on deck!" crashed down through the skylight, and with that ominous cry in their ears the two lost no time in seeking the deck.

But M'Guffie had his own ideas as to what was fitting and proper to be done before leaving an engine-room, and growling, "If the *Mandarin's* salved, no man will say *her* engineers left in a panic," he went from valve to valve and stop-cock to stop-cock, going through the usual routine of "shutting her up" as calmly and exactly as if the engines had just been "rung off" alongside a wharf. Lastly, he went to the desk and wrote up the log-book, even to signing his name to it in his great, square, school-boy hand. When he finished he found water about his feet; already there was an inch above the floor-plates. The ship was doomed.

He moved towards the ladder, but as he passed the little dynamo he noticed a slight

sparking at the brushes, and all his life's training forbade that he should leave the engine-room till he had adjusted the "lead." Then he went to the ladder, mounted some half-dozen steps, and stayed there, taking a last look at the scene of his twenty years' labours, at the great, queenly machine that he had served so faithfully, that had always possessed for him a personality—ay, sometimes of late it had seemed even a soul. There she stood, a splendid example of the marine engine, the most amazing and perfect work of man's ingenuity the world has yet produced, still fit for many years of further service, but her career finished, her work done. Never again would the life-giving steam sing through her pipes and slide-valves, never again would the sobbing pistons pass their travail to the responsive cranks. The great double crank-shaft was still, now to take its rest for all time on the bed of ocean. The salt water would ravish its mirrored surface, the barnacles and the sea-slime would quickly make of what had been his pride but a mass of rust and corruption. The awful futility of his long years of troubling—of all mortal toil and endeavour—

came to him, lonely there in that sinking ship, and crushed him down as with a mountain's weight. The injustice of it all swelled his old heart to bursting. A wave of tears welled up in his eyes, and as in a dream he heard the mate shouting: "Hurry up, Mac; she hasn't five minutes more to float." He gave no sign; only for a moment he lifted his face to the skylight, where one white star showed through the driving scud. And—who knows?—perhaps in that moment for him the veil was lifted, and Life, and Time, and Eternity were not as we see them. Then he stepped softly back down the ladder.

## MAGUIRE'S TRIP HOME

WE worked at the same vice-board in the erecting shop of the Wallsend Slipway. I met him next in Singapore, sailing round the marble-floored dining-hall of Raffle's Hotel on a pair of roller skates, majestic as a circus elephant on a tricycle. He was then second engineer of the Straits Flotilla Company's *Pariah*, and settled for life. Six months later we were shipmates on the *Caravan*, a spacious old side-wheeler that we left spouting flames on a mud-bank of the Yang-tse-Kiang, while six hundred stolid Chinese passengers roasted to death rather than leave their luggage. After that his career was somewhat meteoric. He joined the Chinese navy, when rumour credited him with using his dress sword for a packing knife. His ship sailed with ammunition for the Yalu; but though nothing of her larger than a life-belt ever came ashore, the next evening but one he gave the marker in



the Chefoo Hotel fifty in a hundred, and a beating. I ran against him next outside the "Call" building, San Francisco, wearing a soft black felt and States-built clothes. He told me he was first assistant on a California coaster, an American citizen, and there to stay. Then for years I lost track of him; and when again I heard of him he was out East once more, salvaging a French warship on the coast of Tonkin, chief on a Jap coal-boat, building a wharf in Shanghai—no sooner out of a job than in again. Then I learned of him in Java running a sugar fabrik; and last that he was dead of the fever, and buried in Sourabaya. So when I stumbled up the awkward stair of the Honmoko tea-house it was quite in the nature of things that I should find him there, in a *kimono*, with O-Kiku-San pouring out his beer.

"Come in, old man!" he called loudly, no more affected than if we had parted yesterday. Then to the smiling *mousmé*: "Another Kirin." And in the little matted box of a room overhanging the green-grey waves of the Gulf of Tokio we fell to swapping news and reminiscences, moistening our hurrying tongues betimes with the good lager of the

land. He was a pictorial liar, and I accepted the choice assortment he offered thankfully, till he told me that since we last met he had been "home." Then I ventured to question. I knew he could have no money; and I greatly doubted his ability to find a home-line chief simple enough to let him work a passage. The story of twenty years' High Life in the East was printed on his flaming physiognomy. He must have weighed something over eighteen stone; and his name and repute were known in every port, from Yokohama to Singapore. But his was too great a mind to be troubled by aspersions on his veracity.

"I went home as senior engineer on a Russian. I have Russian naturalisation papers in my trunk at the hotel now. But, mind ye, I'm making no shout about it. This is an unhealthy climate for my latest countrymen just at present. I had a gay time on the trip, and, dear man, you nearly lost your old friend, Saunders Maguire; and if you're not in a cast-iron perspiration to get on board, I'll even break it to you gently."

O-Kiku-San wrestled affectedly with the refractory cork of another bottle of Kirin,

to relinquish it eventually with a fetching *monie* to her gigantic admirer; and I settled me down to be entertained by this man of many affairs—and nationalities.

“The fact is, I was down to my last bean, or I would never have set foot on the rotten hooker. I had the promise of the next vacancy in the Nippon Coal Company, but their new ship had just been laid down when I left Nagasaki, so that meant six months before they wanted me—the Japs haven't yet got the knack of building ships by the mile and cutting them off in lengths, Geordie fashion. The Russians were offering twenty-three pounds a month — great money for second — and every dead-beat in Shanghai had been off on board after the job, and returned after a look round, swearing that rather than sail on the *Ptobski*—that was the blighted wreck's name—he would starve on curry and rice till the Northern ports opened. But I had some heavy ‘chits’ due at the end of the month, and the need to change my address was pressing. So I made a bee-line for the Russian consulate; and in five minutes was out again, having secured the

berth, a month's advance that I badly needed, and a Russian citizen's papers I had no blamed use for at all. I slung my dunnage into a sampan, and was pulled on board. My new ship was a fiddle-bowed, herring-gutted, three-masted freak, a sort of cheap and nasty imitation of a P. & O. liner, with a lot of kerosene-case houses on deck, and a long funnel ringed like a barber's pole. Her owners had sent her East to sell to the Japs, but the Japs weren't taking any.

"They had put the only English-speaking engineer in the crowd on the look-out for me, and he introduced me to the chief. A big, unhandy-looking man, but he shouted a drink like a lamb, and hoped I would be comfortable. Then my chaperon took me round my new shipmates, and they all put up drinks. I made sure I had struck a home.

"But I changed my mind when I went below. The engines were by one of your famous scientific firms always on the eternal hunt for improvements; and every old exploded patent ever designed to break the heart of a sea-going engineer was in that engine-room. She had Biggnock's valve gear, four different brands of feed-pumps each less use than the others,

an ice machine of the kind that when it isn't broken down turns out hot water, and a governor that you could always rely on to shut off steam when you wanted to go full speed astern. The old *Aurora*, after being six months on the Bombay Reef with the China Sea ebbing and flowing round her cylinders, had a sweeter engine-room. I had intended to take a *pasear* round the stokehold, but when the assistant engineer mentioned that she had come into Shanghai with her furnaces down, I had all the news I wanted.

"We got underweigh that afternoon bound for Dalny, to load up for Riga. I thought it well to show willing for a start off; and, though it wasn't my watch, I stayed below going down the river, twigging moves. After she got off I noticed there was no vacuum showing, and naturally, thinking the gauge stuck, gave it a tap. My English-speaking chum saw me, and told me not to bother about it, and that there would be plenty of vacuum when we got into salt water. What his theory was, who knows? And if these galoots didn't take her down dead slow to Woosung on an ebb-tide! I am told that it was only by steady dozing with champagne

that they kept old Davey, the pilot, from having a seizure; and that he was carted on board the cutter in a state of collapse, singing out: 'No steerage-way. That's right, boys. I can't hold any more, but pour it over me. I likes the smell.'

"Of course, as soon as we got clear of the pilot it was down 'pick' and overhaul the air-pump; when, as I expected, we found the valves—you can bet they were somebody's patent!—in smithereens. And the ship had just lain two months in Rotten Row, but these genial geniuses had never found time to have a look at the pumps.

"She was supposed to be good for thirteen knots. It took us four days' hard plugging to make Dalny, which works out at something under seven; so I knew right away the sort of picnic I had let myself in for. But it was no use getting my rag out; and as nobody, from the skipper downwards, seemed to trouble much if the engines rested for an hour now and then, I didn't see I was called on to take it to heart either. As for the fat chief, when a smash came off he locked himself in his cabin. But always, once she was well underweigh again, he appeared,

and put up drinks for the crowd; and then retired, smiling a large smile that said plain as paint he considered he had done his whack of the duty.

“The Jap torpedo-boats opened the ball at Port Arthur on the very night we made Dalny; the civil population received twenty-four hours’ notice to get out, and, of course, our packet was taken up by the government to run refugees. So now I was right in it. The Russians had made the town the dumping ground for all the skum of Europe, and the old *Ptobski* coralled the very pick of the outfit. All day they kept swarming up the gangway ladders till there was barely standing room on the old hooker; and I wondered what they were going to do when night came and they wanted to lie down. And didn’t they just hum! I tell you, sir, when I think of that fearful crowd of unwashed, cursing, struggling, gin-crawl mechanics, pimps, and things calling themselves women, and then look round this good, clean land, I’m ashamed to call myself a European.”

The speaker paused; and in entire sympathy I filled up his glass, judging from the look of dire disgust on his massive features that the

recital had given him a taste in his mouth that only beer could wash away. He pledged me in a kind of large abstraction. Her country's Good God of the Picturesque moved O-Kiku-San out to the verandah rail, and posed her blue-black and purple affectation against the faintly crimson west. From out the next-door bath-house the glistening shapes of half a dozen bathers ran shouting down a bamboo stage into the eye of the sunset. The world was steeped in the glowing content of a July evening in Japan.

"We got to sea somehow; and, of course, when off the Promontory, and right in everybody's road, we broke down. None of the feed-pumps would work, and it was either stop or burn the boilers. Before we had rested half an hour a Japanee man-o'-fight hove in sight, and started to steam round us. But when she came to leeward she slewed sharp on her heel, and lit out for the north. One sniff was enough.

"Six hours' tinkering got us underweigh again; but so it was right down the China Sea. Every few hours we stopped for something or other; we had a howling monsoon right astern of us, or we would never have



made Singapore. As it was, we didn't average six knots, and the commissariat department was in a bad way when we got alongside Tanjong Pagar Wharf.

"At Singapore I indulged in a bit of brain-fag, and soon decided that this sort of jambaree wasn't good enough for Saunders Maguire. Running down the China Coast with ports like stepping-stones all the way was one thing; crossing the Indian Ocean was another contract. So up I went to the skipper. I had judged him a decent sort when signing on; and, for a blessing, he savvied enough English to get on with. I found he liked the idea of the trip ahead of him as little as I did, and we soon came to an understanding. For I was a man with a grievance. When I signed on as senior engineer I understood it was to act as second; whereas, once on board, I found there were three of us seniors, each with less authority than the others. And then they wondered why things were rotten in the engine-room. When I left the 'old man's' cabin I knew that whatever I did I had him behind me; and I had guaranteed to get the *Ptobski* into Suez in

nineteen days, and I was going to keep my word, if I had to get out and shove.

“The very first day out I had a chance to air my authority, and you bet I caught on to it. The feed-pumps played out as per usual. Now, as auxiliary, she was fitted with an old Grier's pump that none of the gang knew the first blamed thing about. I had been grafting at her between whiles on the way down, and got her into something like working order, and I said to me, says I: ‘Now's the time to try Old Reliable.’ I stood by and gave her the steam, and off she went, steady and slow, a fair treat to look at. Then I told the man nearest me to give her the water, cautioning him as he loved his life to open the discharge first. The next thing I knew the pump brought up all standing. I gave her a little more steam, and the whole blamed side blew off the water end with a force that nearly carried it through the side of the ship. It just missed taking my legs with it. The careless idiot had done the exact opposite to what I told him—opened the suction before the discharge. So there was all my work for nothing. I tell you, I was wild. I knew somebody was going to get hurt; so when the floor-plates rose up and banged that

grinning ass of a Russian engineer behind his fat head I wasn't a bit surprised. The gang gathered round and calculated they were going to lay me out ; but I had an inch-and-quarter spanner as a persuader and the bulkhead behind me, and they thought it would be safer to bring the skipper into it. What the 'old man' said to them I don't know ; but they turned to like lambs, and till the day I left the ship I was top dog in that engine-room. Breakdowns were to seek for after that, and when one came off, you bet somebody fell in the soup. I must have hammered every man in the gang at least twice before we got to Suez. I had run Liverpool-Irish firemen on the Western Ocean, and I didn't propose to let any tallow-candle-eating crowd get away with me. I worked them up for all they were worth—not that it was much, an old China fitter would have done more than the six of them. I was on watch all hours of the twenty-four ; I virtually lived in that engine-room ; but I got her into Suez a day ahead of time, and I was happy.

"It wasn't for long. We were working engines into Port Said when there came a howl and a rush of steam from the stokehold ;

and there were our furnaces down again. That cooked my goose. I hopped on board a B.I. boat, and made it all right for a passage home. Then I tackled the skipper for my discharge. Instead, he offered me thirty pounds a month and the chief's billet—the fat man was going on sick-leave. The old chap put it so nicely I didn't half like leaving him in the lurch. But the thought of crossing the Bay with those tin furnaces was too much, and I was bound to have chucked it, when in dropped his daughter. Come down from Odessa, she had, for the trip round. And oh!—my prophetic! Wasn't she a peach! A bit of real jam—you bet! A fine big armful, blue eyes, *and* a complexion—the sort of thing I hadn't run up against for years. She looked at me; and I had to go—just had to.

“A fortnight's hard graft found us ready for sea. We had a fair trip round, and some comfort—the refugees had gone to Odessa by a volunteer fleet steamer. The skipper's daughter turned out a trump; and the mate and I ran a dead heat for poodle-dog's billet right up to Gib'. But I put on more steam crossing the Bay, and he was too busy looking out for the old tank's deck fittings to respond.

So when we got to Riga it was any odds on me.

"The first night in port I was full of work; but next night things had steadied a bit, and I thought I might venture to leave the old ship to herself for a few hours. The skipper's daughter was drawing me like a four-pole dynamo; and I climbed into my shore clothes and made the beach—for the first time since Shanghai. I spent a gorgeous evening—music and drinks right up to here; and I toddled back to the water-front some time in the middle watch, walking on springs. And there was that God-forgotten old *Ptobski*, just one flaming fiery furnace, spouting smoke and sparks from stem to stern. That corpsed me. I never even bothered about my duds. I had my pay in my pocket, and I just popped on board a Geordie that was leaving at daylight, and four days later I stepped ashore in canny Newcastle. I had two months at home; and you don't catch me back in a hurry. No, siree; the East's good enough for me. Home was never like this; was it, sweet one?"

"But what price the skipper's daughter?" I ventured.

"Tallow-haired beauties are off, old cock. O-Kiku-San owns me just at present."

O-Kiku-San passed a round, brown arm about his shoulders, and they smiled into each other's eyes. Evidently this particular Anglo-Jap alliance was a success. I came away then.

## THE FLAW IN THE CRANK-SHAFT

"NEVER tell me this here is a new flaw, Mr Sowèrby," said the chief hotly. "Good God! What—what criminal negligence!"

"I examined that bearing most carefully not later than in Hong-Kong, sir. I refer you to the work-book, sir. I don't expect you to take my word, sir; I only ask——"

"Be quiet, man! I'm not quite a child. Will you be quiet!—and let me think."

The second, a swollen, unhealthy-looking man of fifty, smothered further sulky protest in his grey beard. The chief, spare, quick, nervous, many years younger, and temperamentally as physically the antithesis of his junior, took a few jumpy turns about the confined space of the lower platform, his pale, clean-shaven face showing plainly the distress that possessed him. The other engineers

## 48 FLAW IN THE CRANK-SHAFT

stood by, looking anywhere but at one another.

It was twenty-five feet below the sun-kissed surface of Yokohama harbour; down in the lowest deep of the *Queen of Corea's* engine-room, where the sun's rays never penetrated, and the electric lights had glowed day and night without eclipse for the twenty years the big old liner had held the blue ribbon of the Pacific. The massive cast-iron columns beloved of the old Clyde builders straddled wide over their heads; and far above them, four decks up, through the network of iron gratings and ladders, the round of the mighty cylinders showed against the distant light of day. All about them was the auxiliary machinery, and movement.

In one corner the hydraulic accumulator that worked the cargo hoists strained and panted. A pair of dynamos snapped and sang in a recess off the shaft tunnel. Refrigerator engines sighed and banged on a groaning platform just above them. The big fans that forced the boiler fires whirled and hummed. And pumps—pumps were everywhere. Big pumps and little pumps. Pumps for salt water and for fresh. Boiler pumps and ballast



pumps and bilge pumps. Pumps that toiled upright, and pumps that did their best lying down. Pumps that spun round with a nerve-racking clatter, and pumps that thrust directly with hardly a sigh. Untiring pumps that toiled steadily and continuously; and knowing pumps that sent an allotted amount of water somewhere, and then rested, and at the required moment started themselves again with a cough and a wheeze. But the engineers of the ship were only aware of all this subjectively; their whole thought was of the big length of shining crank-shaft laid bare in their midst, with the long, ugly black crack parting its polished surface.

An uncomfortable minute passed; then the chief turned to them. "That'll do, Mr Sowerby; close up the bearing," he said; and the staff knew that the famous liner, *Queen of Corea*, was to sail for San Francisco with a damaged crank-shaft, trusting to luck. But they said no word; he was the responsible man; they had some faith in his judgment, a measure of sympathy for one of their cloth in a difficult position, and a sense of the discipline that bids men go on and keep their heads shut.

## 50 FLAW IN THE CRANK-SHAFT

So as the setting sun was gilding the snowy crown of Fuji-San the big ship poked her black nose between the lighthouses on the breakwater, bound on her long voyage across the empty wastes of the Pacific. The decks were alive with passengers taking their farewell of the Orient, for it was the year of the Chicago World's Fair, and every berth was taken. The banal talk of the promenaders, the tired joking of the men, the high, hard chatter of underbred women, the shrill, sweet laughter of little children filtered through the venetians of a roomy cabin on the upper deck where a man in uniform sat staring at nothing, biting hard on the end of a lead pencil. Henry Veering, chief engineer, had something to think about.

Henry Veering came of decent lower middle-class folks — the self-centred, self-sufficient, self-respecting million that the nonconformist press exalt as the backbone of England. His father, a draper in a Midland town, had early inculcated the youthful Henry with the sacred truth that nothing in life really mattered except material success, backing up his doctrine by a well-judged course from the writings of the school of the immortal Samuel Smiles. As

the boy showed a fondness for mechanics he was apprenticed to a firm of Tyne-side engineers ; and, when aged twenty, as the result of highly creditable night - class endeavour, he gratified his parents by winning a Whitworth Scholarship. Two years later he entered the service of the Green Comet Line as fourteenth engineer of one of their Western Ocean fliers, duly primed with the idea that he must make everything subsidiary to "getting on."

In the Green Comet Line, as in all companies worth serving, promotion is slow, and fifteen years passed before he was on turn for chief. And when his step came it took him to the far Pacific, on which ocean the Green Comet Line run steamers from the Far East to San Francisco, in connection with an American railway company. So in Hong-Kong, no later than a week ago, he had taken charge of the *Queen of Corea's* engine-room. As the ship had sailed the very day he joined, he had of necessity taken the state of the machinery on trust. He had done so with an easy mind when he found in the second of the *Corea* none other than the first chief he had sailed under ; a man who, when his rapid tempers and unshackled tongue had made him

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impossible to every skipper in the employ, had been relegated to the post of lesser prominence and attrition, but of whose energy and mechanical ability there had never been any question. Veering omitted to take into account the probable result of such downcome on a man of Sowerby's bitter and egoistical temperament; and so it was with a feeling closely allied to dismay that he had to own, before twenty-four hours at sea, that the ship's engines were in a state very far from efficient, and that the man he had for years looked up to as a capable engineer had degenerated into a hopeless and unreliable "soak."

Barring minor troubles that, to the new chief's disgust, the junior engineers seemed to look on as part of the routine, nothing of moment had occurred till they reached the entrance to the Gulf of Tokio. Then the engineer of the watch had sent for the chief, and when Veering went below he found the after crank-shaft bearing running warm. Small study of the refractory journal told him that the defection was due to something more serious than an oversight on the part of the oiler. He had required the bearing to be opened for inspection as soon as

the engines were "rung off" in Yokohama : when there was disclosed a flaw that he knew must have been there and growing for months, perhaps for years, but which the second vowed he had no knowledge of. Now, the *Queen of Corea* was due to sail again that very evening, so to fit the spare shaft would mean delaying the ship for at least two days. To do so Veering knew was virtually equivalent to sending in his resignation. The Pacific branch had no superintending engineer to guarantee the need of such a course to his owners' representatives. In any other ship he might have been forgiven ; but not once in twenty years, neither because of Pacific gale, nor of north-east monsoon, nor of typhoon of China Seas, nor of defect of the great three-crank compound that gave her her twenty knots an hour, had the old ship broken schedule time ; and that men should say that he, Henry Veering, Extra Chief, Whitworth Scholar, Engineer R.N.R., had marred her splendid record, was not to be thought of. So, after a short but fierce fight with himself, he had decided as we know.

There are men who, once they had made

up their minds, would have gone on and troubled no more about it. Conscientious, level-headed, unimaginative souls, with never a doubt as to the wisdom of their own judgments, they lay up for repairs the finest liner or the poorest tramp, or carry them out to sea—and oblivion—without a thought beyond the condition of the machinery in their charge. For them the owner's frowns or the super-scientific criticism of Board of Trade officials have no terrors. By the light of a long experience, and the sacred understanding "Engines first," they do their duty; and responsibility lies lightly on them. British engine-rooms boast many such; but Veering, unfortunately for himself, was not one of them.

He had brains, he had knowledge, he had experience; and on any matter of routine repair might have been trusted to give a correct decision; but he lacked the grit, the phlegm calmly to judge, the fine detachment to consider impersonally a really serious issue. He was a mid-Victorian product of manufacturing England, the outcome of generations of flaccid men and tea-drinking women, born to neurotic trouble as the sparks fly upward.

But if he had taken an unjustifiable risk—and already he had his doubts about it—he was man enough to see that every precaution humanly possible was taken to guard against untoward result. By a studied adjustment of the cut-off he diminished the shock on the bearing to the minimum without reducing the revolutions. Oil, of course, was fed to the bearing virtually without ceasing; and a thin dribble of that precious commodity at sea, fresh water, was played on it, and kept it cool, and formed with the oil an elastic film around the damaged shaft, making a “cushion” to receive the alternate thrust and pull of the mighty piston. Steam was kept on the reversing engine; and of the three engineers on duty together, one was detailed to stand his watch by the stop-valve, that there might be no delay in shutting off steam if sudden need arose.

The last was the usual and the correct thing to do, futile as Veering expected it to be, if the worst happened. An engine whose working parts may weigh anything up to 150 tons, when its revolutions are only limited by its strength to resist centrifugal force, is not to be stopped by hand like a sewing machine;

indeed, the recorded cases of shaft fracture in which the engineer has been able to stop the madly-whirling masses before they have further damaged themselves or the hull of the ship, are few. The cases in which a broken connecting-rod has knocked out the bottom of the ship are obviously not to be found in the records. Veering knew all this—the literature of marine engineering is both exact and monumental; and his first night at sea, though the weather was fine and the bearing gave no trouble, was not a restful one.

His berth was directly over the engine-room, and opened on to a short alley-way, one end of which led to the deck and the other to a grated iron platform hanging high above the shining cylinder covers, whence, by a series of spidery steel ladders, the engineers found their way below. Every sound in the engine-room, especially in the quiet night watches, came to him distinctly. Of course he had not been long enough in the ship to be certain of the “beat”; but he had learned enough to know that the engines had developed a jar that had surely not been there on the night before the ship made Yokohama. As yet it was to be



distinguished only by the severely-trained and anxious ear; none of the deck department, more than one of whom had been years in the ship, had remarked anything out of the common. Indeed, while the rudder remained amidships even Veering could hardly differentiate that particular sound amid the myriad noises of the engine-room; but let the rudder be put over ever so little and the injured bearing told its troubles with no uncertain voice, and Veering ground his teeth in sympathy; and once, when the rudder was put hard over to deflect sudden death from a lightless and slumbering Jap fisherman, Veering sprang from his bunk thinking that the end was surely coming then and there.

Although he knew it did more harm than good, not once but half a dozen times during the night he appeared below, to the huge disgust of the men on duty, who naturally considered such conduct showed want of confidence in their watch-keeping abilities. Indeed, towards morning he had worked himself into such a state of nervous apprehension that he simply could not keep out of the engine-room; and when grey day showed through the skylight it found him

pottering about in soiled pyjamas, dog-tired and weary-eyed.

The morning broke fine, without wind or sign of it, the long, placid, Pacific swells fading away into a haze-shrouded horizon. The deep, narrow hull driven so relentlessly to the eastward cleft the watery mounds with a regularly-recurring swish and sizzle, its steadiness unaffected by their shallow undulations. So when Veering, after a most grateful bath and a poor attempt at breakfast in his cabin, stepped out on deck, he found the roomy promenade thronged with passengers—family groups in canvas chairs, the “liver brigade” exercising in couples, the man with the binoculars mooning over the rail, the half-dozen of middle-aged sports swapping risky yarns outside the smoke-room door, the flirtatious pair in the recess between the life-boats, the mob of children screaming over a game of deck quoits—the same old crowd he had learned to know so well on the Western Ocean.

But to-day they fascinated him; he viewed them by a strange, weird light, haloed by a new interest. He wondered how they would take it. He saw them roused out of their

comfortable berths on a black and ugly midnight with word that the ship was sinking. He saw them, men, women, and children, partly-dressed, pitiful, afraid, bundled frantically, anyhow, into half-swamped and wholly inadequate boats. And now they looked so self-sufficient, so comfortable, so confident. Ah!—if they only knew. He supposed they were rich—most of them; well, they had so much the more to lose. A gentleman of Jewish type, by ship report a railway magnate and many times a millionaire, here broke in on his reverie.

“Good morning, shief. We will make a schmart bassage if this weather holds out, eh?”

Veering could only trust himself to nod; he felt in all his bones that if he opened his mouth just then he would tell this genial and aggravatingly-prosperous-looking gentleman that at present his chances of reaching San Francisco and his chances of making a meal for a hungry Pacific shark were exactly equal.

The sociably-minded one passed on, and Veering, by a big effort, switched off his insane daydream, and backed into his cabin.

"Damn you!" he snarled at his wild-eyed reflection in the mirror, "another minute and you'd have shouted your secret to these fools of passengers—you know you would."

He flung himself on his settee—reaction set in—and in five minutes he was asleep. He slept till called for tiffin. With the word his troubles claimed him again, and in every sense he was awake. The beat of the engines, the weather, the sea—all were as when he closed his eyes. With an effort he spruced himself up and went down to the saloon; and a certain damsel with innocent brown eyes sitting opposite to him decided that he looked "quite sweet"; and, later on, wondered out loud why he did not wear dear little gold stripes on his shoulders like the chief officer; as to which the fifth officer, when he found time to forget the awful responsibilities attached to the post of passengers' baggage buster, condescended to inform her was by reason of his being—"only an engineah, y' know."

They had a calm sea all that day, and from study of the bearing Veering felt fairly persuaded that, granted a fair weather passage, the damaged shaft would take them to their

destination. So he turned in early with the intention of making up the arrears of sleep that he felt he owed to himself. His effort was but partly successful. He managed, indeed, to keep out of the engine-room, but throughout the night, at intervals seldom longer than an hour, he would wake to a full sense of his responsibilities; and only a reassuring study of the weather and the beat of the engines would soothe his over-active brain again into slumber. So he saw the sun rise on a perfect morn.

By evening his temper was nearly normal. This his creditable condition was largely the result of two conversations. He went below when the third was engineer of the watch; and the third, a man of years, and eloquence, and a knowledge of the weaknesses of internal organisations other than those of marine engines, had assured him that the shaft was running easier all the time, that the flaw had surely been there for years, and that, under the present scientific treatment, it was in his opinion safe to take the old ship to 'Frisco, and back again if need be.

"Poor sowl! he needed heartening," this philosopher remarked to the junior of his

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watch when Veering had gone up the ladder.

"You're a blooming old crawler, Patsy," his straightforward critic replied.

"I am so. It's the soft hear-rt of me as does it. I never could bear to see man or baste in pain. That shaft will peg out the very first time she races; and I know it, and he knows it—if he knows anything. But you saw for yourself—he went away whistling. My son, I wouldn't have that man's nerves—no, not for twice his pay."

And in the afternoon Veering made the acquaintance—as such things fall out on ship-board—of the girl with the enquiring brown eyes; and when they parted two hours later he was filled with wonder at the number of things he knew. As he never doubted but that the girl was equally impressed, so he derived a stimulating satisfaction from the interview. That night he slept much better.

So for a week day followed day, each chill, and palely bright, and glistening, as fine days are in and about fifty north in the Pacific. Cheered by such perfect weather, Veering quickly recovered his equanimity; and, indeed, was not a little ashamed of having allowed his

anxiety to master him so evidently. Possessed by the fear that his juniors might presume on his small lapses into familiarity—a common infirmity of certain minds—he now developed an access of dignity as unnecessary as it was unexpected, and the first to run up against him was the big-hearted Irishman who acted as third. Sheehan, on meeting the chief below, remarked how well the shaft was running; when Veering, as men say, “put him in his place,” with the few banal, but not the less biting, phrases so easily said, so impossible to recall. Now the big, good-natured, brainy third was the admiration of his shipmates, and when Veering insulted him he insulted every man of the engine-room staff. Sheehan was the man of all men whose goodwill at a crisis was worth most to the man in charge of the *Corea's* machinery; for on Sheehan it depended whether the staff did their exact and entirely obvious duty, or backed up their chief with mind and muscle. In no line of life is personal popularity such a valuable asset to the leader in a tight place as in the engine-room at sea, where so much depends on energy and initiative, and so little on knowledge of routine.

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So now the chief's visits to the engine-room were somewhat painful incidents in his day. The men on watch seemed always too busy to see him, and he received but curt official answers coupled with the salute due to his position, instead of the respectful "time of day" and the informing disquisition on the running of the machinery that he was accustomed to. But Veering, while he felt the change, could think of nothing to be done except clothe himself in a still more repellent air of pomposity, and effect not to notice anything unusual. This he did the more readily as he was assured in his own mind that the shaft was good enough to last the remaining four days of the voyage, and thus he could afford to despise the humours of his junior engineers.

As his mind became easier, and he was able to banish betimes the thought of the over-worked mass of steel on whose good behaviour he had staked his livelihood and reputation, he began to appreciate his position as head of a department, with time and to spare to enter into the social life of the ship. He found himself in demand as an organiser of concerts, quoit tournaments, children's games—what not :



the various ways of killing time indulged in by passengers that he had despised when he could not join in them, but that now he entered into with enthusiasm, partly because he found it gave him a certain popularity grateful to his egotism, but more so because he found therein something to divert his mind from the poor leviathan grinding out her soul in the depths of the ship.

With the last few days also there had entered into his life a new interest that seemed likely to make all others of small account. He had looked too often for safety into a pair of questing brown eyes ; but as the owner never remonstrated with him on the risk he seemed bent on taking, progress was rapid, and on the approved lines for such affairs on shipboard. So on the eighth night out it was nearing "six bells" when they parted in a shady corner of the moonlit promenade deck ; and he had wondered if he might kiss her, and she had wondered why he had refrained.

He turned in and fell asleep, oblivious now as to the fractured crank-shaft, and brown eyes smiled on him in his dreams. He awoke with a start, to become conscious of sailor cries about the deck. He switched on the light, to

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find he had slept but a short two hours. Then he heard a voice he took to be the mate's ; and arose, and stepped on deck.

"Just seeing all fast, chief. The glass is coming down by the run. Looks as if we were in for a blow." Thus the oil-skin-sheeted C.O., as he passed, bellowing spasmodic orders at his shadowy troop.

There was no wind as yet, but an opaque, purple dark lay on the deep, and the void overhead sent down betimes a weird, long-drawn moaning. A low swell was moving from the north-west, and Veering was shipman enough to know that the wind when it came would blow from that direction. As they were steaming on a great circle, this meant that the sea would be almost directly astern, about the worst quarter it could come from as affecting the damaged crank-shaft.

Again he sought his bunk ; not that he expected to sleep, but there was nothing else to be done. For with the knowledge that bad weather was upon them all his anxiety, his doubts about the crank, had taken possession of him again. He knew that he had done everything possible to ease the shaft, and that there was nothing now but to wait. So he

spent the long night watches counting the bells, and straining his ears to catch the notes of the long crescendo for trumpets that opens the first movement of that grandest of symphonies, a gale on the open sea. Towards morning he fell into a miserable dose. He awoke to the rattle of a squall on his ports, and a thunderous *rat-tat* on the door of his cabin; and as he sprang from his bunk the door opened an inch, and the gruff voice of an oiler told him that he was wanted at once in the engine-room. Even as he stood there, his faculties not yet fairly awake, there came an alteration in the beat of the engines; they faltered, slowed a little, and then speeded up again to over the normal revolutions; and Veering knew—and for a moment the knowledge stayed the beating of his heart—that already the motion of the ship was sufficient to lift the propeller partly out of its proper medium: that, as shipmen say, the engines were racing. And they were still four days from their destination.

He made his way down the ladders with every nerve a-tingle, and his clutch on the handrails so uncertain that he came down the last—and, luckily for him, short—flight almost by the run. The second was on watch, and

merely waved him towards the damaged bearing. To his horror he saw it was shrouded in a thin film of steam: this, although two hoses were playing cool sea-water on it full bore. Even as he stood above it fascinated, he felt the ship's stern going up. For a moment the shaft whirled madly; and Veering, utterly losing his self-control, cursed the engineer at the throttle for not shutting the steam off quicker, when the valve was already hard shut. The angry flush that flamed on the youngster's face told Veering that again he had made an ass of himself, and another enemy. And when the propeller dipped again into the sea the engines brought up abruptly, and the bearing emitted an ominous, nerve-jarring double thump that vibrated through every frame of the ship, while oil and water squirted from it in every direction.

"That happened once before, so I thought it well to call you. She can't stand much of that," said the voice of the second in his ear.

Veering knew what the man was hinting at: that it was advisable to slow her down. "Slow her down!"—the engine-room spun round him at the thought. Did the man realise what it meant to him? "Slow her

down!"—and face an enquiry, when all was bound to come out, and his certificate would be suspended, perhaps cancelled. "Slow her down"—and end his career. The disgrace of it all: how could he go home to the father and mother who were so proud of him, of his success! The panelled bulkheads, the towering engine framing, the living tangle of polished steel all about drew off and away from him, and he saw himself standing lonely there facing this cruel crisis; and a great self-pity welled up in his heart. Why was this trouble reserved for him? How many went to sea for a lifetime, and never knew breakdown nor the fear of it! The injustice of it! Not one engineer in a thousand had such awful luck as this. Thus his redundant imagination played with him, while he stood there, giving no sign, only gazing at the bearing as if he would see into the very heart of the steel. He raised his head, to find the second and the others of the watch regarding him strangely. So he pulled himself together, assumed a confidence he did not feel, and said bravely to the second: "The shaft's all right. Keep her going, Mr Sowerby!" Then, with chill

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despair nipping his heart, he climbed the ladder.

He knew that if the sea increased he must reduce the speed, but he set himself to postpone the evil moment to the very limit of safety. So he settled down in his cabin to listen, to watch, every sense on the rack to judge of the motion of the hull, of the response of the labouring engines. The regularly-recurring *boum-boum* of the damaged bearing got home on his wound-up system like a surgeon's probe. Thus he spent the morning watch; and when "eight bells" sounded in the engine-room, the clang brought him to his feet white and gasping: the ringing had seemed in his brain. And at that moment he felt an unusual great roller pass under the ship, and as one struck dead he bided the result. At the pounding that followed in the engine-room he had almost shrieked aloud; and he knew then and there that he was beaten. Indeed, he must make haste to ease her down, lest the option be lost to him. No one on board the *Queen of Corea*, shipman or landsman, but must have felt that tremendous shock to the machinery, and be aware that something of

moment was the matter. So down the speaking-tube he sent the necessary orders; and then reported the damaged shaft to the master. With over a thousand souls in his charge it may be believed that that gentleman encouraged him to take every available precaution.

Even so, with steam and revolutions reduced to the lowest, the shaft was to be the cause of unending anxiety. For all that day the wind steadily and relentlessly increased, till it blew a whole gale, and one of the fiercest remembered on the North Pacific. And the sea answered to the call: till by nightfall great, hurrying, grey rollers, all with the send of three thousand miles of unbroken water behind them, sped past the ship and roaring into the gloom astern, rejoicing in the knowledge that before them they had yet another three thousand miles of fleeting, thundering, ravaging life. When the speed was reduced the long, narrow hull of the old liner rolled so dangerously that the skipper felt forced to put her head on to the sea; so now the most careful throttling could have small effect on the racing when every roller that passed under her stern lifted the propeller completely out of the water.

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Watch succeeded anxious watch in the engine-room. The afternoon watch saw the light fade when the canvas cover was drawn over the skylight, and heard the slam of the iron storm doors shutting down on the fiddley gratings, and judged that they were "in for a blow." So they also went about making all things fast; for even that somnolent and stable entity, the anvil, is liable to develop frisky and playful humours when a high sea is running, and has indeed been known to invalid half the watch before it was subdued. The night watches heard the increasing thunder of the gale in the ventilators, and felt the tremors of the stricken hull when "she took it green." But of all this they were scarcely conscious; they had no care but for the -wounded, over-tried, smoking, spitting, frizzling mass of steel that voiced its trouble so piteously every time the engines raced.

Veering stayed below: all the long night he stayed below with the engines, the halting, uncontrollable, spasmodically-whirling engines, and his fears. He knew that his career in the Green Comet Line was ended; but in face of the awful danger that confronted the



ship and the ship's company he remembered nothing but that his egregious selfishness was like to cost a thousand lives. For if the shaft parted the old ship would fall into the trough of the sea, and there was an end of her, and no shipman on board but knew it. And that the deaths of all these people should be laid at his door—and justly—troubled his conscience sorely. For Veering had a conscience—one of the uncomfortable sort that only worked when it was too late: a hooligan among consciences that jumped on a man already down. The successful man has either walked strictly by the promptings of a conscience beyond reproach, or has rejoiced in the possession of a monition machine under perfect control.

For three days and three nights the gale shouted round and over the *Corea*. In that time the wind shifted through north and north-east to east, to die out between east and south in squalls and rain. The result was a mountainous, confused sea that left the old liner stripped clean of boats and deck fittings. And not once in that weary time did the chief engineer leave the engine-room. Such food as was going was brought

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down to him, and he snatched a few minutes' sleep once or twice in a requisitioned deck chair. The other engineers deemed it a puerile exhibition of unnecessary energy; but he meant it as a sort of sop to his conscience; and also he wished to be able to say at the enquiry that he was in the engine-room when the shaft broke. Not that he greatly cared, but it would look well.

No; only let him bring the ship safe to port, and he was done with the sea—ay, if it meant back to the shops and the vice-board again for a living. A curse on the sea! What could men find to like in the life, anyhow? What had it done for him? Taken the pick of his precious years and rewarded him with this—this, that he would not suffer through again; no, not if the owners presented him with the ship at the end of the voyage. Thus, down in the depths of that staggering, drunken pitful of machinery, alternately praying that he might come to port and blaspheming the gods of the engine-room—his gods no longer—did Veering live out the gale that had so sadly marred his destiny.

The shaft held together—against all the laws

of probability, as is the way of such things; the wind went down, the sea moderated, the *Queen of Corea* was put again on her course, and crawled into port—two days overdue. Veering stayed below till the telegraph rung: “Finished with engines”; then, a physical and mental wreck, he set himself wearily to the ladder. He stepped out on deck, glad once more to get a breath of clean air, and a look at God’s good world. And there on the wharf stood old Andy Speirs, Liverpool Superintendent of the Green Comet Line,—all-powerful Andy Speirs, whose mere, “Tuts, tuts; the laddie knew what he was doing,” would have made Veering all right with the ship’s agents—if he had only done his duty fearlessly, and delayed the ship and changed the shaft in Yokohama.

An hour later Veering had told his tale; the shaft had been opened up for survey, and the Great Man, Veering, and the ship’s engineers stood beside the damaged bearing. Speirs took a candle from the hand of an oiler, and, heedless of his immaculate tweeds, went down on his knees and examined the flaw from end to end. Then he climbed painfully to his feet; and when he had

straightened his old back, it was seen that he was fairly shaking—but not from age, nor yet unwonted exertion—and his rugged old dial was aflame.

“What, sir, ye—ye tell me to my face that ye brought this fine ship and over a thousand souls across the Pacific, knowing”—he shifted the direction of a trembling index finger from Veering to the bearing—“*knowing* that flaw to be there!”

Veering said no word. There was nothing to be said. Nor did Speirs. He could have said many things, but they would have consorted hardly with his dignity. But straight he turned and made his way up the ladder; and it seemed to the miserable Veering that even his round, old back bristled with contempt and righteous resentment.

. . . . .

A year later Veering boarded me in San Francisco. I had heard that he was married—a girl he had met on the *Queen of Corea*, I was told, with a “pull” in a firm of ship-chandlers. He handed me a gaudy business card, and I found that he was “running” the water front—in a spider-wheeled buggy. How glad he was to see me! When could I

come for a drive round? The "rig" was at my service any day, and he would be only too happy—etc., etc., *ad nauseum*. And could he do anything for me in engine oils or patent packings?

I congratulated him on his marriage and his shore billet.

"Thanks, old chap, thanks. Best little woman in the world. Yes, yes—quite settled down now, you bet! The sea?—no, *siree*! You don't catch this child at sea—never again! It's a dog's life at best, old man—a dog's life."

## THE TERRIBLE DOWNFALL OF THE TWO MACS

A TOUGH trade, tough ships, tough men, my masters. Thus distinguished was the Spanish ore trade in the early 'eighties; thus it is to-day. Outward bound a coal cargo, homeward bound iron ore, green seas never off the deck underweigh, black filth and red filth alternately in port, the Bay to cross twice in three weeks; ships old, ill-found, under-manned, under-powered; no comfort, no rest, little food, and less pay—but Britain's finest school for shipmen in this age of steam, in undisputed succession to the Geordie collier brigs of a former era. Natheless as the trip is short, and marriage is yet a fairly popular institution, so the Bilbao mail never wants for men, and, from the commander on the bridge to the trimmer in the bunker, all are wedded. And it is a sad fact that the hardest-case mate or the most blood-breathing, black-squad bully

of them all becomes as a small boy in the presence of some scrap of a woman in Port-Glasgow, or Bootle, or Shields, or Forest Gate, and would not have it otherwise.

"An' hoo's a' things running the nicht, Elick?" roared the chief engineer, as he flicked the salt water from his stemmed cap, and hung his soaking monkey-jacket over a steam-pipe.

"No' sae mean ava', Jeck," replied the second, as he cut a liberal chunk from a cake of chewing tobacco, and stowed it away in his starboard cheek. "The air-pump rod is still running as straight as a dog's hind leg; another o' the thrust bolts broke at the back o' six bells; but she steams easy, and the tube-stopper we put in the port biler is still holding out good-oh. But them bilges is a sair fecht. Seven times in six 'oors have I been up to my oxters at the rose-box, and still there's twa feet o' watter in the ship. Where it comes from licks me. The main engines wad dae; ay, ay, the auld bitch hersel' is nane sae bad."

The engines of the s.s. *Alweyn Seyd*, thus affectionately referred to, would have driven a mail-boat engineer demented, and an

Engineer R.N. would have fled from them as from the wrath to come. They had every weakness of design, of material, of workmanship, possible to exemplify in one set of machinery; and all magnified to the utmost by twenty years of deterioration and systematic neglect. Any pair of self-respecting steam hammers would have been ashamed of the awful noise that voiced the complaining of the old compound; but a little thing like that troubled not the two worthies that attended her; they only pitched their voices in a higher key than the afflicting clangorous dirge, and thanked their stars that she turned round at all.

The *Alweyn Seyd* had been built originally for the Turks. The Sultan's government had paid for her the price of a first-class steamer; but by the time the builders had secured the contract from the pasha entrusted with the apportioning of it, and interviewed the firm of consulting engineers delegated to inspect the hull and machinery, they had been left with barely enough to cover the construction of a ship of any kind. But it was a hard year on the River; the work was needed to keep the apprentices going, and



so the *Alweyn Seyd* came into being. Three years later the Prophet sent to the Turks' relief a touring shipbroker, who passed her on to a Welsh firm, who for more years now than seemed believable had run her in the Spanish ore trade. In the Bristol Channel ports she was an old identity; and the stevedores, dockmasters, and such other unfortunates as had experience of the mysterious ways of the crank old box when loading, always spoke of her feelingly as the *All-on-one-side*. She was now thirty hours out from Cardiff, with the Scilly Isles—so her German skipper trusted—somewhere aft the starboard beam, and the hurrying, hollow seas of a westerly gale sweeping her rusty decks from stem to stern.

The second engineer went up the ladder, and the chief was left alone with the wheezing, grinding engines. From a couple of oil lamps yellow, flickering beams cut the swaying dark, and by their aid he made shift to oil round. Six feet in his socks, and built in proportion, how in that half light he managed to escape annihilation was past telling. By the aid of invisible handrails he climbed invisible ladders; he rove himself along dim-seen platform gratings

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where an inch to either side meant contact with hurtling death ; he wriggled, and crouched, and sidled from oil - cup to oil - cup, or paused to hold on, all exactly as was required by the intricacies of the machinery or the motion of the ship ; he went through all the agonies of oiling round a set of engines to which he was a stranger, and finished up without a hair turned — for he and his friend, the second, had joined the *Alweyn Seyd* no longer ago than the morning of the previous day—the day she steamed from Cardiff.

The tall mark poles on the measured mile at Skelmorie were not better known to the seafaring world of the 'eighties than were these two worthies. They both hailed from Aberdeen - awa', but one was long and red, and the other was stout and dark. They were about an age ; they boasted an equal experience on some hundred of the worst ships afloat, and they both held first-class certificates. They had taken to them wives from the same household, and were next-door neighbours when at home. At sea they had all things in common—except overalls ; and whoso spoke unkindly of the one had to fight the other. They would only sail

together; but as really able men with certificates were not too plentiful in those days, they seldom wanted long for a ship. It must be owned they were not strong on theory; but when pushed, either of them could get through as much work as any two ordinary merchant service engineers, and more than any five routine-bound navy artificers. When Elick threw his fifteen stone on a rough file the brass flew as from a planing machine; and to see Jeck the Great doing up bottom ends — keeping the star spanner (a man's burden) in place with one hand, while he worked a sixty-pound fore-hammer with the other — was a sight for gods and Fleet Engineers. The question of seniority they evaded by acting as chief in alternate ships; and on the *Alweyn Seyd* they had signed, as chief and second respectively, as John MacRobbie and Alexander MacTier. But from the Banks o' Clyde even unto those of the Yang-tse-Kiang they were known to shipmen as the Twa Macs.

The *Alweyn Seyd's* ill repute had been known to them for years, but the only other double-barrelled vacancy offering at the time was on a steamer for Shanghai, and the wives

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had vetoed that trip instanter. When they boarded their new home she was under the coal-tip, and they made no secret of the unanimity of their opinion that she looked as mean about the decks as any (condemned) sailor's coffin they had ever cast their (carmine) eyes over; and they came up from a cursory look below assured that her character was thoroughly deserved, and offering to take their Bible oath that the engines were the worst they had yet fetched up against, even in their sadly varied experience. So, when, on relieving the watch, MacRobbie received from MacTier a verdict not wholly condemnatory, he was quite agreeably surprised; for if the main engines themselves were running well, surely such a small thing as water in the bilge would not long inconvenience a man of his mettle. So thinking, he got his pipe underweigh, leisurely lit a hand-lamp, and lifted a trap-door in the engine-room flooring.

When MacRobbie cast the light of the hand-lamp down the opening he got the shock of his lifetime. A black, turbid flood, surging and swirling angrily to the motion of the ship, rose to within a foot of the

plates. MacRobbie shed his air of leisured content as if it had been his overalls, and stood tense and glaring. A moment, and wild-eyed and cursing he shot into the stokehold.

"Call the second engineer! Rin, man, rin! Awa' wi' ye!" he shouted to the astonished fireman on watch.

The fireman clattered off up the ladder. MacRobbie plunged back into the engine-room. He dropped through the trap in the floor-plates. Down, down he went, till his chin was in the water. He was groping on the bottom of the ship for the bilge-pump strum. The ship rolled, and his flaming red head went under to a sudden upheaval of the dark flood. He came up spluttering but victorious, with the knowledge that the pumps were working well. He found the second beside him, and turned on him like a lion.

"Ye're a nice wan, ye are; wi' yer twa feet o' watter, and be hanged to ye!" he bellowed. "Here, look at that!—fower feet, if there's an inch."

MacTier glared with astonishment down the trap; then he rose, and with a fine, if somewhat oppressive deliberation, answered his chief.

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“Maister MacRobbie, if ye mean to insinuate that all that watter was there when I handed over the watch, then I say ye’re a flamin’ leear — chief engineer or no chief engineer; and for twa pins I wad bash the big reid heid aff ye. There was exactly twa feet in the bilge at six o’ the clock, as ye nicht hev seen for yersel’ if ye hadna been o’er tired to lift the door.” Such language might surely be considered a distinct breach of engine-room etiquette, not to speak of discipline, and the long man was not slow to assert his position.

“Bash here or bash there, Maister MacTier, I’ll hev ye to remember that we’re on articles; and the man that touches me—the chief—in this engine-room is slap up against the law o’ the land. And ye’ll kindly observe I need no junior engineer to teach me ma business. If there was but twa feet-o’ watter at six, then, by your way of it, she has made another twa feet in the last hour. G’way wi’ ye, man!—the thing’s no’ believable. If I only kenned where it came frae I wad na worry.”

“From the taste wad ye no’ be inclined to think it was a portion of the Atlantic, Maister MacRobbie?” asked MacTier, in his most

aggravatingly - deferential second engineer's manner.

The large man gloomed at him.

"Gang awa' and start that donkey-pump, and a sight less o' your jaw!" he snarled.

A few minutes, and the clatter of the old-time whirligig pump embroidered itself on the rumbling noises of the engine-room. The chief carefully noted the height of the bilgewater, and then for a quarter of an hour stood by anxiously. Again he dropped his measure-stick. He hauled it up, glared at it, and loosed a howl that brought the second shooting to him out of the semi-darkness.

"Fower feet six! Ech, man, Elick!—the bottom's drapt clean oot o' her."

The moment the two worthies realised that, in spite of all their pumps could do, the engine-room was surely if slowly filling, their little difference was clean forgotten. "The bilge injection!" cried MacRobbie; and the two men raced round to the valve. The second threw his weight on the wheel, and—sat down with crashing abandon on the iron floor. Wheel and spindle had broken away in his hand. "May the gude God——" he began, with awful emphasis; then his jaws shut with

a snap. They had no time now to curse; for the bilge injection is the last stand-by of the engineer in a leaking ship, sacred to emergencies like the present; and now that it had failed them both men knew that they must either find the leak or suffer themselves to be drowned out of the engine-room; and they knew too much about iron-ore traders to expect the water-tight bulkheads to keep the ship afloat.

"Tak' the port side, man, Elick, and I'll tak' the starboard!" cried MacRobbie; and at frenzied speed he shed his overalls, his boots, his underclothing, till he stood peeled and naked, a gigantic figure, white and gleaming in the half-light. The second followed on; and without another word the two were off on their terrible quest. If the bottom of the engine-room had indeed sprung a leak they knew they could do nothing. But they also knew that the known cases of an iron ship springing a leak are few, whereas the ships that have foundered through the bursting of one of the network of great pipes in the engine-room are without number. So it was to these pipes they looked for the solution of the mystery: these pipes that ran everywhere, under the engines, under the boilers, under the bunkers, and



always down on the floor of the ship, in the bilge—the bilge, where there was now four feet of fluid filth and water.

They needed not to waste valuable time in painful diagnosis. Like all level-headed men they had long ago thought out the best treatment to meet this or any other emergency; they were beyond theorising—they knew. So they could let themselves go like maniacs, and yet sacrifice nothing of method. They attacked the flooring. The big iron plates rose on end and fell away from them with a resounding clash, and where they had been were gaping squares of surging, greasy water. They started aft, and worked forward along either side; and to an onlooker from above it must have seemed that the *Alweyn Seyd's* engine-room was in charge of demons.

The frames of an iron ship are spaced roughly two feet apart, and average three feet in depth on the floor. This means that the ship's bottom is a network of small compartments two feet wide and three feet deep. The walls of these compartments are pierced with holes large enough to allow a man's body to pass, and by means of these holes had the two Macs to carry out their investigations. But they had

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every confidence in themselves ; the desperate nature of their task never occurred to them. Indeed, if they had stayed to consider the chances they were about to take it is certain they would never have started. The leak—to find the leak was all they thought of.

They worked always in the dark, mostly under water ; they breathed only when the ship rolled the flood away from them. They wormed themselves through manholes clearly never intended for men of their build, when to stick was certain death by drowning. They crawled over jagged frames, they wriggled, and pulled, and kicked themselves forward under jagged beams into and out of impossible spaces. They fetched up with sickening shocks against unexpected angle-irons ; they dropped with teeth-loosening jars into unforeseen crevasses. If they loosed their grip for an instant the surge of the crazy bilge-water banged them against some baneful projection ; or jammed their naked bodies to the burning boiler bottoms. But they fought on ; not at all because the ship was in danger, even less because they feared for their lives, but because this thing touched their reputations. Never should it be said that the Two Macs let an engine-room in

their charge fill up, and knew not whence came the water!

So after ten awful minutes they came to the forward end of the machinery space, and emerged in the stokehold. Clad in black filth as in a garment, grease and coal-dust solid in their hair and beards, streaked with blood where the jagged iron had taken toll of their skins, dripping, breathless, but with the fire of battle unquenched in their eyes, they came together—two fearsome demon scarecrows in the red glow of the furnaces.

“Damn the thing!” said MacRobbie.

“Devil the hate!” said MacTier.

The piping was all right. They returned to the engine-room. The relentless water had risen another three inches in the bilge. The two men looked at one another, and read the *Alweyn Seyd's* fate in each other's eyes.

“Hopeless,” said MacTier, and shook his head.

“Quite,” said MacRobbie; “either the old trap has opened a seam, or a lead rivet has dropped out of her.”

Then he pulled on his boots and his overalls, and without another word started up the

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ladder. MacTier set an oil-feeder to fill under the tap of the tank ; and while it ran up he cut himself a pipeful of tobacco, and carefully loaded and lit his old and charred cherry-wood consoler. For the affair was out of their hands, had gone beyond them ; there was no call to hurry now. Then he oiled the engines round, trimmed the lamps, and attended to various small adjustments, all as deliberately as if the bilge had been bone-dry.

When MacRobbie came down the ladder he wore a set scowl that told all things to his experienced shipmate ; still, by way of sympathy, MacTier enquired : " An' how did the auld cock tak' it, Jeck ? "

MacRobbie's reply is better left to the fancy of the reader ; but, as the German skipper and the Welsh mate had followed down the ladder at an indiscreet interval, the exercise of imagination in their case was not called for. The fat Hamburger glared at the dark flood in dismay ; then he turned on MacRobbie.

" Mine Gott ! " he shrilled. " Vat for you let so mooch vater in mine shiff—you pig of a dirty Scotchmans ! Gottverdomm, shall I lose mine goot old shiff as ever vass trough a trunken, lazy Klaskow keelie ! "

"Tak' care what ye're sayin', Captain!" said MacRobbie, through his teeth.

"Vat you say—dake gare, dake gare in mine own shiff! Shust wait till I gets you ashore, and you'll see how I fix you. I dakes your dictet from you for dis—your dictet, I tells you!—and into shail you goes, you——"

"If ye dinna tak' this thing o' yours awa, Maister Tjohn Tjones, I'll break it up!" cried the sorely-tried MacRobbie to the grinning mate.

From behind the furious skipper the mate winked the wink of derision and understanding.

"Vat! you lay your hand on me, you——" And the skipper started bravely on another chapter of the filthy abuse for which he was distinguished. MacRobbie, however, had endured as much as his temper would allow; but luckily a ridiculous *contre-temps* saved him from committing that most serious of sea crimes—an assault on the master. For, when with blood in his eye he strode forward, the skipper started backwards—and disappeared into the bilge with an astounding splash. And when rescued he had had enough of engineers and engine-rooms, and departed up the ladder shedding greasy water and threats of vengeance.

"She's a gone ship, I suppose," said the mate, as he turned to follow.

"She's all that, Maister Tjohn Tjones," replied MacRobbie. "If ye hev the brains 'o a canary ye'll get yon sausage-eating eediot to run back for Falmouth; and we doon here will do oor damnedst to keep her going as long as possible."

"You attend to your old coffee-mill, mister, and leave me to look out for the deck. And when I ket you ashore, I'll teach you to call a man Tjohn Tjones when his name iss Tjohn Tjenkins."

"Good iron, Taffy! I'm your mark," replied MacRobbie. The mate was tall and able even as himself, and he recognised with joy a kindred spirit. "And remember, we'll depend on you for oor chance wi' the rest when it comes to the boats. I'll lippen naething to the Dutchman after yon dookin'."

"He'll play none of his Dutch tricks aboard here while I'm mate—ye may rely on't," replied the Welshman; and MacRobbie's mind was easy.

It may be thought that the "bonds of discipline" were unbelievably strained aboard the *Alweyn Seyd*; but what is to be expected

when, on a British merchantman, British seamen are under the command of a foreigner that they know holds the post by virtue of no special qualification except cheapness, and a servile readiness to anticipate the carefully unexpressed wishes of his owners as regards overloading, or indeed any other profit-earning evasion of the meddlesome laws enforced on ships flying the accursed red ensign—the flag of the country that provides him with a livelihood.

A few minutes later the ship shivered and paused to the crashing aboard of an exceptionally heavy sea. “Good for the mate—they’re changing the course!” cried MacRobbie.

Soon the motion altered, and the men below rejoiced, for they knew the ship had been put about and was running for safety. MacRobbie stayed with the engines, and did all he knew to coax the last procurable revolution out of the rickety machine; while MacTier abode in the stokehold, and encouraged the firemen by precept and example to get every possible pound of steam out of the boilers. Such of the hands as were not on duty formed line on the stokehold ladder and passed buckets of water from out the bilge;

for it was soon seen that this their race with death was to be a near thing, and every little would help. They must fetch the *Alweyn Seyd* at least somewhat into the Channel before they abandoned her, for no boat could live in the sea running where they were then.

At midnight the stokehold plates were awash. At first the work had gone with a swing and a joke; but, as hour by hour they noted how little effect their efforts had to stay the rise of the relentless waters, they fell silent: till the ring of the firing shovels and the clang of the furnace doors were the only sounds heard above the purring song of the boilers and the overhead thunder of the gale.

By two in the morning the men at the fires were hard put to it to keep their feet in a wildly-surging flood that rose betimes above their knees. Now at every roll the water boiled and spat in the ash-pits of the centre furnaces. The bailing had been abandoned, for the bunker shoots were under water, and all hands were required to pass coal from the 'tween-decks. But in spite of their herculean, despairing efforts, the pointer on the steam gauge went back steadily.



Another hour and the centre fires were drowned out, and they stood in the flood to their middles. They had stretched ropes across the stokehold; and while one man fired, two men held on to him and to the ropes, and thus made to stand up to the weight of water that otherwise with every roll of the ship would have hurled them against the iron bulkheads. But many times, in their anxiety to get at the fires, the water took them unawares; and it was to be observed that now the rudest treatment could not draw from them so much as one oath, and that they dragged themselves back to their posts in a teeth-grinding silence. Now, when the crew of a British merchantman have by tacit consent forsworn swearing, Eternity looms very near.

They worked on; not that they had hope, but because sea traditions forbade the idea of giving in while they could keep the engines going. They worked on, though now the roar of water in the hold told them the ship was doomed, and that in her next plunge she might take them with her down to the ocean floor that, in this particular locality, must be carpeted deep with the bones of

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Britain's sailors. They worked on, dead-weary and soulless, with breaking backs, unresponsive muscles, chilled, stiff, and aching limbs. They worked on, when all sense of suffering and care for time had departed; and then, just in their darkest hour, came a loud hail from above, and behold—they were new men.

“Below there!—all hands on deck! We’ve sighted the Lizard Light!”

As the men chased up the ladder the engines stopped of their own accord. MacRobbie stayed below to shut the valves; while MacTier hurried to their cabin, and packed in one great sea-bag—the joint kit that met their simple wants afloat. In ten minutes the lifeboat had been lowered, the fourteen hands and their belongings had been crowded into her, and the *Alweyn Seyd* was abandoned. They left her with her decks awash, and in the certainty that she would not float half an hour.

They had pulled barely a mile when MacRobbie, who had been anxiously feeling the contents of the bag, uttered a heartrending groan. “Ma boots, man, Elick—ma braw new shore-goin’ boots that I peyed nae less than twelve-and-six for a year ago come Glesca Fair—God forgi’e ye, they’re no’ here!”

"Everything ye owned in the cabin is in that bag, John MacRobbie," said MacTier, highly indignant that one who knew him so well should think it likely he would leave anything of value behind.

"Ah, man, but they were in the galley drying. I'm certain sure I tell't ye o't."

"Ye did naething o' the kind. Ye were sae mighty uplifted wi' yer tom-folly o' shutting her up, ye clean forgot to mention them. Serves ye richt to lose them, say I."

"Ah, weel, it canna be helped. That leaves me just twelve-and-six to the bad on the voyage. Oor wages will hardly pay oor passage back. She was a rotten trap, was the *Alweyn Seyd*, and I'm thinking we're weel oot o' her; but if I had known for certain how the water was getting into her, I would have left her wi' an easier mind. And, in spite o' ye, Maister MacTier, I tak' credit to mysel' that I took time and shut her up correctly; ay, even to the main discharge valve—it shut wi' a click, I mind—I jalouse it was under water." Little did MacRobbie think that to the end of his days he would curse the spirit of bravado that made him carry out his quite superfluous routine;

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and that in after years, whenever his friend MacTier wanted to annoy him, he knew of no way more sure than to mention a certain discharge valve that shut with a click.

It was eight of a wet and windy morning when they made the beach in Helston Bay. They got the route from a coast-guard, and shouldering their bags set out to tramp the twelve long miles across the hills to Falmouth. Shipmen are but poor pedestrians, so it was two in the afternoon when they topped a rise that gave on a fine prospect of the harbour. There were in port the men-of-war, half a dozen fruit schooners, a West India mail steamer, some two or three cargo boats, and also, at anchor in the midst, surrounded by coal-lighters, the ship they had abandoned just ten hours ago, the ship they counted at the bottom of the Channel—the *Alweyn Seyd*.

For a moment the crowd stared with jaw dropped and utterly confounded. Then the skipper broke loose. He cursed himself; he cursed his luck; he cursed his owners, his mates, his crew, his engineers—most especially did he curse his engineers. But MacRobbie and MacTier had started at the run down the hill, for this seeming miracle touched

their reputation, and they would learn the worst as soon as might be. On the wharf a genial waterman broke it to them before the others came up.

“That ship out there, gents — well, now, that’s the rummiest go I ever comed across. A tug-boat brought her in this morning; picked ’er up floating around off the Lizard half full of water — a fine salvage for the tug, eh? They started to discharge the coal to lighten her a bit, and what d’ye think they found had been the trouble? Well, it’s too blamed funny for anything, but the main discharge pipe had bust in the coal bunker; and these here galoots belonging to her had been all the time pumping their ship full of water with the engines. Tight as a bottle she was everywhere else; so when the engines stopped, of course the water stopped coming in, too. Ain’t it comical? Why, mates, can’t you see the brave engineer in the stokehold crying: ‘Keep ’er goin’, boys; for yer wives’ and families’ sykes, keep ’er goin’!’ And the noble Capt’en on the ’igh and lorfty pouring tots o’ rum down the speakin’-tube into ’is ’eroic crew. And then to think that all they were doin’ was a-drownin’ of theirselves out!

Oh, Lord! this yarn will be the death of me; I knows it will." The two Macs drew cautiously away while yet this man of abandoned fancy was convulsed in chuckles.

"An' ye're the man wha took pride to himsel' for shutting the main discharge valve!" hissed MacTier. "If ye'd left things alane the ship wad be now where she ought to be—at the bottom o' the sea. This thing will stick to us, a sin and a disgrace, till the day of our death. I'm done wi' ye henceforth, John MacRobbie."

"Wheesht, man, wheesht! — hae ye nae sense? We're baith in this," said MacRobbie, in the whisper of agony. He saw the crisis was too tremendous for them to waste time in recrimination. "Wha ever heard o' a main discharge passing through a coal bunker—answer me that? Say nae mair!—see what money ye hev!" And he pulled out a handful of silver, and fell to counting it feverishly.

"That'll do—that's our fare to Bristol," he said, when they had reckoned their united resources. "From there we can work a passage to the Clyde; and after this, I'm thinkin' that Cheena Coast boat will just suit us a treat."

He flung the sea-bag over his shoulder, and strode off in the direction of the railway station. For a moment MacTier lingered with a vague idea of facing the music. Then he remembered that MacRobbie had pocketed all the change, and he followed his mate. So while the skipper was yet informing the water-front at the top of his shout of the fate he had in store for them, the two Macs were well on the first stage of their journey to Shanghai.

## THE VOICE OF THE MACHINE

### I

IT was down in the cheerful, well-lit engine-room of the Pacific liner, *Queen of Siam*. Across the calm sea the hull progressed without the semblance of a pitch or a roll; the big cranks revolved with the unvaried, plodding intention of a mill-engine or a water-wheel; and the perfect confidence and peace that comes of association with well-cared-for engines on a long, smooth water run lay on the machinery department.

"This suits me," sighed the Low-Pressure Piston; "I could go on like this for ever."

"Yah! How about your blooming old springs?" sneered the After Crank-Shaft Bearing; "you know they're not good enough for more than a ten-day run."

From the design of the machine it follows



that the L.P. Piston and the After Bearing are always at enmity.

"I know nothing of the kind," the L.P. Piston began indignantly; when his neighbour, the L.P. Slide-Valve, chimed in with a soothing wheeze.

"Don't take any notice of him, Chummy. We're six days out from Yokohama to-night, you know. He'll have the water service on him to-morrow; and all the time in Honolulu, when you and I, Chum, are peacefully slumbering, he'll be having the Fifth and Sixth scratching his in'ards with a scraper or a file. Leave him alone, Chum; he's got troubles of his own."

"Whose fault is it if I have?" ground out the After Bearing. "All I want is to be left carefully alone. What can you expect when greenhorns like the Fifth and Sixth are put on to annoy me in every port of call. Bedding me down they call it, too! *Yap — boom — spit!*" And the cantankerous Bearing spewed oil all over the lower platform.

"Here, you dry up!" objected the adjacent L.P. Eccentric; "it's only pure cussedness that keeps you from running as well as the

rest of us, anyhow. I saw the Third putting you together himself; and he's as good an engineer as they make 'em in this employ."

"Hear, hear!—and it's me that knows it," wheezed the Air-Pump vacuously. "Look at the times I've been having since the Third persuaded Madorkins to fit me out with metallic valves. With the old-style trash I needed overhauling in every port, and even then my gratings were eternally getting choked up with scraps of canvas and composition. Look at me now! Twenty-six inches of vacuum, and all my passages clean as a whistle. I fairly sing for joy every stroke of my life."

If he sang it was only audible to an ear in thorough sympathy: which is hardly to be wondered at if it be remembered that the Air-Pump, to be content, must be filled with a perfect emptiness. By "Madorkins," it should be explained, the Air-Pump referred to no less a personage than Mr Semple, the chief engineer. The Air-Pump, of course, meant no disrespect; it only called him by the name in use among the irreverent junior engineers. For Mr Semple's long-headed Scotch wife ran a most successful poultry

farm on the landward shore of San Francisco bay; and hospitality was ever a virtue of the clan Semple. "Come over to Oakland and spend the nicht, laddie; and I'll show ye ma Dorkins," was the recognised form of invitation; and as "Madorkins" was the good soul known in half a hundred engine-rooms on eastern seas.

"Talking of the Third," boomed the High-Pressure Crank - Pin, "did I ever tell you what I learned when he and the Sixth were tightening me up in Yokohama?"

"No; tell us all about it," buzzed all the machinery together. Marine engines always take a most sympathetic interest in such as serve them faithfully.

"Now, listen! You know he has a wife in San Francisco."

"Yes, yes, we know. We've seen her," chorussed the machine again. "One of the right sort. A braw lassie from our own bonnie banks o' Clyde." Engines are always patriots and imperialists. Perhaps they absorb their opinions from the men who serve them.

"Well, he's expecting the arrival of a little third engineer. He's to get a cablegram at Honolulu."

“Ah—whizz—boom—clack—rr-urr!” exclaimed the engines; and, “You don’t say so!” broke in the little Reversing Engine on the starting platform. “Now I know what made him fidget so on watch last night. He kept playing with my handles till I got so disgusted I felt like making you all go full speed astern just to give him a lesson.”

This impertinence called down on the cheeky little machine a shower of imprecations from all parts of the engine-room.

“You try that on, and you’ll be flung on the scrap-heap!” chanted the deep tones of the Thrust-Block from far below. “You know what happened to my holding-down bolts the last time you took one of your cantrips.”

“Just fancy reversing enormous weights like us when we’re doing twenty knots ahead—the idea!” cried all the parts in indignant unity.

“Yah—you!” sneered the small engine. “Keep churning away—it’s all you’re good for. If I put you full astern: full astern you go—the lot of you. I’m the master-machine in this engine-room.”

## II

AGAIN it was night, and the *Siam* was at sea. Dear, dazzling, dreamy Honolulu, in its frame of silver surf and emerald mountain, had dipped behind the sunset horizon. The big ship was running across a "brave west wind," and the tall engines swayed to port, and then to starboard, with an unchanging moment and stately motion in fine accord with their size and dignity.

"I like this—I like this," sang the High-Pressure Guide contentedly. "I never run better than when she's rolling just a bit. The motion distributes the lubricant over my surfaces beautifully."

"I'm hanged if I do," puffed the H.P. Gland asthmatically. "I'm a bit slack in the neck-bush; and when she's falling about like this the rod flops all over the shop. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if I blew out any minute. A nice story that would make: the *Queen of Siam*, the Cock of the Pacific, stopped at sea to repack the H.P. Gland. Madorkins would be worth listening to on that occasion."

"Oh, stop growling, do!" mumbled the After Bearing. As the L.P. Slide - Valve had prophesied, he had been overhauled in Honolulu, and now nearly all his *bump-tiousness* had departed. "You would think to hear you talk that you were an important part of the machinery. Why, five minutes of time and two turns of patent packing would bottle up your wheeze for a month."

"You had him that time, pal," clanked the L.P. Crank - Pin; and the other parts of the engines also rejoiced audibly at the H.P. Gland's discomfiture. For the H.P. Gland is never popular. He blows more than all the other glands put together, and seems generally to delight in keeping the engines warm, and wet, and uncomfortable. The buzz of the engines all jeering together at the Gland quite frightened the life out of the sixth engineer, who ran round and round the engine-room, expecting every moment to discover some part of the machinery gone to smithereens, or in the act of going. This is quite a common occurrence: the man on watch hears a strange noise, and thinks something is the matter, when what he hears is really only the engines talking to them-

selves. Old sea-going hands, of course, know this: which is why they possess such untroubled figure-heads and tumble-home from the waist up.

"You all know," boomed the L.P. Crank-Pin, in his grand manner, "that I was examined and adjusted in Honolulu. Now, the Third was holding the spanner, the Fourth was using the flogging hammer, and just at the last: 'One more blow for luck,' said the Third. '*And* one more for the baby,' said the Fourth, and then they all laughed. Now, does any one know anything definite?"

"I do," shrilled the little Reversing Engine. "I saw the telegram. Only three words it was: 'Both doing well.' Indeed, I couldn't help seeing it. The Third took it from his pocket and read it over six times during the first half-hour of his anchor watch." And just as he finished speaking, the Third came through from the stokehold.

"A-a-a-ah, zick—oompah—oompah—whizz," remarked the engines pleasantly; just as you might have said: "Allow me to congratulate you, dear boy." And the engines were quite sure the Third understood; for he smiled and

nodded to them, and said to the Sixth: "The old girl's running a treat to-night."

The two engineers came together for the small confabulation that does so much to lighten the watch; and the engines held their steam and ran very quietly that they might miss nothing that passed. But just then the broad back of the Chief was seen coming slowly down the ladder, and "What's up now?" whistled the H.P. Gland, for Madorkins' presence below during the middle watch was something in the nature of an angel's visit. The Sixth discovered a sudden interest in a far part of the engine-room.

"Good-morning, serr. Is everything doing well?" said Madorkins, in his most official manner, looking about him with the slow, blue eye that seemed to have a special gift for detecting a leaking gland or a dry guide surface.

"Everything's running perfectly, sir. With this breeze down the ventilators she steams easily. I could guarantee another turn without exceeding the fuel allowance, if you wanted it."

"Na, na; seventy-one point five—not another decimal. With this weather that will put us



alongside the Mail Dock just one hour ahead of schedule time, and that's good enough. To arrive earlier would seem as if I wanted to show up the sister-ship; and Andra M'Spindle, o' the *Queen of Corea*, is a good friend of me and mine, and I wad na like it to get into the reid Hie'land heid o' him that I was rubbing it in. You see, he owned to me in Yokohama that the sooner his new tail-end was fitted, the easier he would be in his mind, and that schedule time was as much as he liked to ask of her. His wife spent a fore-night with us the last time we were in 'Frisco—an Ayr lassie she was, if I remember truly. Ye're living in Seventh Street, ye said, eh?—some of those city houses are far from healthy. Fresh air, country eggs, coo's milk—that's what's wanted. . . . *Look at that fool of an oiler, serr! . . .* You'll get the wife and the bairn over to Oakland just as soon as we hit the wharf—if Jean has na the sense to have them there already. . . . *For gudeness sake, man, ask that all-fired idiot if there's only one oil-hole in the ship! . . .*"

And when the Third had reprimanded the amazed oiler, and turned to thank the old man for his thoughtful invitation, he was just

in time to see his back disappearing through the engine-room door. Thus left alone, the Third soon fell a-dreaming; and all that watch the engines gave no trouble, made no untoward noises, for they knew what he was dreaming about, and they would not disturb his dream.

## III

TEN days' rest had the engines enjoyed alongside the wharf at San Francisco, when next we find them underweigh. They were grumbling a good deal among themselves; they often do the first night out. The best of engines may take as much as twenty-four hours to settle down to their work. The H.P. Piston-Valve was making himself particularly disagreeable.

"If that fathead of a Fourth Engineer doesn't start the lubricator soon, some of my springs will break," he grunted. "I'm dead sure the idiots that overhauled me must have put some of them back wrong side up."

"You're bound to have a growl of some kind after you're overhauled," breathed the L.P. Slide-Valve unkindly; "why can't you try to be like me, and never need overhauling?"

Mr Piston-Valve, your temper gets worse every trip."

"Any bally old cast-iron scrap can work in steam at ten pounds to the square inch," retorted the Piston-Valve. "You try it at one hundred and sixty for a year, and then talk about temper. Why, if you were melted down there wouldn't be enough of you left to make a twopenny frying pan. Now, if the Third had only put me together I know I would have given no trouble. The Second's all right; but he can't see to everything."

"Just my trouble," mumbled the After Bearing. The After Bearing is undoubtedly the worst grumbler in the engine-room. "These young idiots screwed me down so tight I can scarcely turn round. Now, if the Third——" He would have been growling yet, if the round, singing tones of the H.P. Connecting-Rod had not interrupted him.

"Silence, and listen to me, you grumblers, and all of you! In ten minutes the Third comes on watch. After what he's suffered, I think he deserves a peaceful watch. I ask you, as a self-respecting set of engines, to grant him such a watch. Otherwise, at the

first grunt I hear from one of you, I am prepared to break with the cross-head and smash up the entire machine. The Third is a white man, and an engineer of parts, and I don't propose to see him worried in his time of trouble."

The H.P. Connecting-Rod is always listened to with respect. He speaks seldom, and always to the point. And all the machinery knew that what he said he meant, and that he was quite capable of carrying out his threat, and a broken connecting-rod is a terrible thing. So the engines assured him that they would give the Third no trouble: this, not only because he required it of them, but because they held the Third in quite as high respect as their mentor did.

Eight bells struck, and the Third and his assistants relieved the watch. "Poor chap, he looks fairly broken up," whispered the L.P. Slide-Valve.

"If I had met him outside the engine-room I don't think I would have known him," breathed the H.P. Gland.

The Third stood for a minute listening to the H.P. engine; then he started the lubricator.

"Observe!" said the H.P. Piston-Valve; "observe! He knew what I wanted before I uttered a single grunt."

"Surely you did not think that he would allow his private affairs to interfere with his duty to us!" hummed the H.P. Connecting-Rod. "No, sir, he is not that kind. By-the-by, I have not yet learned the details. Mr Reversing Engine, kindly tell us what you know, and as quietly as you can, please!" The Reversing Engine, because of his eligible position on the starting platform, is the depository of all the news of the department.

"Alas! there is little to tell," sighed the Reversing Engine. "His wife and child were dead, and the one coffin held them when we got to San Francisco. They died the night after we left Honolulu: the night Madorkins arranged to have them over to stay with his wife."

The long hours of the "graveyard" watch dragged on. That night there was no coming together of the engineers in lightsome parley; the Sixth eyed his stricken friend wistfully, but could not bring himself to break in on his sorrow. The Third went about his duties as if he had been a part of the machine;

only towards six bells he roused himself and eased back the nuts of the After Bearing.

All the watch the engines ran smoothly and sweetly, with never the suspicion of a wheeze or a grumble. And when the Third had adjusted the After Bearing to his liking, he stood and looked the engines over with moist and shining eyes ; and the engines were assured that he knew he had their sympathy, for when next he stooped to try the temperature of the bearing a tear plashed on the polished steel.

## THE COAL CURE

EIGHT bells, soft but sonorous, from the big brass on the fo'c's'le, dying out melodiously into the mellow night. Eight bells, ringing, metallic, from the engine-room, not offensively tuneful, produced by the requisite application of a cold chisel to a suspended steel bar.

The third engineer stepped from the silver glow of tropic stars on deck into the electric glare of the engine-room, slid easily down a couple of flights of shining steel ladders, and landed lightly on the starting platform. The slouching, ill-thriven man at the desk turned to him, wearing an air of astonishment that if not genuine was at least well achieved. "You—what do you want here, lad? Where's the Chief?" he snarled, drawing out his vowels as men do on the banks of Tyne.

"I'm here to relieve you, Mr Snyder," replied

the Third; "the Chief——" Eloquent, surcharged with sorrow, was the shrug of his broad shoulders.

"Drunk, as usual, I suppose, you mean. Why can you not speak out, man? It's no secret. All the ship knows it. The Chief——" And he mimicked the high-pitched drawl and slightly theatrical habit of the young Colonial. "I presume you take after the deck lads—think him a fine man and a gentleman because he's not above standing you an odd whisky and cigars. A gentleman!—that for your gentlemen! Give me a man with less frills that can stay sober. For myself—I'm about tired of keeping six-hour watches."

The Third's sharp-featured, clean-shaven face flushed, but he kept his temper. "That's nothing to do with me, Mr Snyder," he said quietly, but with a rasp to his tones that the Second, clever in small things as are his kind, was quick to notice and take warning from. "What I want to know is—will you accept my relief?"

A pause, while the elder man tried conclusions with the hard grey eyes. It was hopeless; his shifty green orbs fell, and he turned away, hiding his discomfiture in the grumble:



"Oh ay; I suppose there's nothing else for it, lad."

The Third gave him no time to retract, but was off on the routine of "taking over the watch." Along the line of the engines he passed; the long, lithe figure of him in his white pants and singlet—washing is cheap in China, and the Celestial Coasting Company's engineers were always a dressy crowd—seen ever against the dark but gleaming tangle of the hurrying "triple" machinery. Crank-pin, and cross-head, and pump-link, he dropped his hand lightly on them as they flashed past: never the slightest change of temperature but told its tale to those experienced finger-tips. Then he climbed to a grating so close under the cylinders and so narrow that he had to stoop and turn sideways as, sniffing piston-rods and feeling guides, he squeezed between the columns and the flying cross-heads; remembering always, as one not yet weary of life, the good old saw: "One hand for your owner and one for yourself, and *the best one for yourself.*" He sped behind the engines to lay his ear for an instant against the sighing air-pump. He dropped into the shaft tunnel, and faded away up the line of softly-whirling steel. A minute

and he was out again, and had passed into the stokehold. All must have been in order there ; for, hardly had the Second finished writing up his log, than he stepped up to him with the usual half salute, saying : " All right, Mr Snyde ; she'll do."

The Second growled something that might have been either a " Good-night " or an imprecation, and shambled off up the ladder.

The Third posted himself in the cool draught from the wind-sail, looking forward confidently to an untroubled four hours. For the *Dragon* was now twenty-four hours out from Singapore, and the engines had settled down into the steady, rhythmic beat so satisfying to the senses of the trained engineer. And as it was the eight-to-twelve watch — the Chief's — he was keeping, he had as oiler the Number One fireman : a little, old, dried-up, but leather-lunged and untiring Chinese, who had been going to sea as coal-trimmer in an old side-wheeler on the Shanghai-to-Canton run while the Third was yet a squalling infant in " Sunny New South Wales." So he knew that most exacting business — the oiling — was in safe hands.

His first hour, but for a five-minute break to

"feel round," he spent dreaming of pleasant Manly Beach, and a pair of prodigal "bar-lambs" who called him "Billy." Then it was borne in on him that the Number One was acting strangely. In the intervals of his oiling he hung about the starting platform, doing nothing with uneasy ostentation. He polished his hands frantically on a piece of clean waste, casting betimes a depreciating glance in the Third's direction. If he caught the Third's eye he smiled—if a weird and wonderful relaxation of the myriad wrinkles on his mahogany countenance could be called a smile. It dawned on the Third that the old Chinese wanted to speak to him. "What's the trouble, Number One?" enquired that kind-hearted young man; "got the tummy-ache?"

"No, no; my all light. Chief engineer belong sick?" countered John.

"Ay, ay, belong sick," affirmed the Third airily.

"Ah!" A pause, during which he burnished his hands as if he would bring the skin off. "Ah!—chief engineer—long time I savvy he. Welly good man, eh?"

The Third was in agreement to the point of profanity.

"Second engineer — no savvy he much — welly good man too, eh?"

Again the Third was in complete and forcible accord, but it may be doubted if his reply carried conviction to his astute interlocutor.

"Ship go Hong-Kong?" was the next and unnecessary query.

"Of course," said the wondering Third.

"I think no can," shaking his old head with conviction.

"Now we're getting near it," said the Third to himself, long enough shipmates with Chinese to know that he had not been approached merely to hear a dissertation on his superior officers. Then to the other: "What for no can go Hong-Kong?"

"Only got five days' coal. Suppose catch small typhoon no can go Hong-Kong, I savvy."

"The deuce you do!" ejaculated the Third, sufficiently impressed. "Are you sure?"

"Sure—you can look—see!" So saying, the little man grabbed a hand-lamp, dived into the stokehold alley-way, and shot up a stinging-hot steel ladder into the coal bunker, closely followed by the anxious Third. A hurried calculation with a piece of chalk on

the bulkhead told him that the Number One was right; and he returned to the engine-room knowing that they were face to face with what is certainly the most awkward, and may easily be the most terrible, predicament that a ship's company can find themselves in.

The *Dragon* was only a coaster, "good for ten knots in smooth water," but liable, as are all her class, to drop down to a little better than seven in a sea-way. And it was five days' steaming at ten knots to her destination, and she had exactly coal sufficient for five days' steaming on board. Truly the clerk of the weather would have to keep a kindly eye to the *Dragon* if she was to make the voyage. And this was the month of typhoons—the dread month of September that rhymes with "remember" in the sailor's jingle epitomising the Law of Storms.

A few minutes of hard thinking found the Third in a quandary. He knew that to act with a single eye to his duty meant reporting the shortage at once. But to whom? To his Chief—whom he knew to be in his bunk, and "dead to all the world." To the skipper—who was bound to report the matter;

which would mean ruin and disgrace to the man for whom he had a profound pity, and some liking, and even respect. To the Second—a feeling, strong but inexplicable, told him no, never; the Second least of all. To the mate—no, he was a man of straw; it would be the same thing as telling the skipper. He had it—"old Molly"; yes, he would tell him. Molly was the man; Molly would know what to do—he always did. John Mauleverer, second mate—"Molly" to the China Coast community—was the Third's own peculiar chum, and he loved him even as Tam o' Shanter did Soutar Johnny, and for the same satisfactory reasons. Arrived at this conclusion, he shouted for the Number One, and swore him by all the gods of Balmain and Woolloomooloo to disclose the matter of the coal shortage to no man. The Number One promised cheerfully, and there was wisdom in his words: "No belong my pigeon."

So when the second mate came off the bridge at midnight—the *Dragon*, like most China Coast boats, only carried two mates—he found the third engineer in his cabin. In a few curt phrases—for every minute is of

value to men keeping watch-and-watch, and his friend's bunk yawned for him—he voiced his trouble. His oracle washed, changed to pyjamas, and had a big Manilla well underweigh before he got his answer. “You must sober up the Chief, and then leave him to work out his salvation,” he said, strong and straight. “And see you tell no man; especially not our precious friend, Mr Snyder.”

“D’ye mean to say he would go back on the Chief?” asked the Third, firing up; “you may find that sort of meanness in the deck department—you won’t among engineers.”

“Come off, my son!” jeered his imperturbable mentor. “I’ll allow that your cloth stick together passably well—indeed, lie like one man on occasion—as I, in the course of an entirely undistinguished career in the mercantile marine, have proved to my undoing; but not the MacSnyder clan—nay, never Snyder’s kidney. Trust that reptile just as far as you can throw him! Now we go to operate on the Chief.”

“What d’ye mean?” cried the Third, something dismayed.

“Why, dump his liquor, of course. He’ll

never sober up as long as he has a drop in his room."

"That's all jam for you," growled the Third; "but how about me—his junior—if he wakes up and finds me wallowing in his gin locker? My name will be mud when we get to Hong-Kong."

"Keep your wool intact, son! Your part will be to stand at the door and drop his grog over the side slick as I hand it out to you."

So they settled it; and five minutes later the last bottle from the Chief's locker plopped into the sea. "A good job well done," said the second mate, as they stole off to their bunks; "and I wouldn't take his month's pay to have his poor head in the morning."

The tropic day was breaking in pearl and rose without the port when the Chief opened his eyes. In the sorry stupor of the drink-sodden he dragged himself from his bunk and across his room to the spirit locker. At first his dazed intelligence refused to take in the full meaning of what had occurred. But when understanding came to him he sunk on his settee, white, wide-eyed, shaking, sober as the day he was born. Some one had



emptied his locker. Some one had done for him what he had often felt called on to do for others—the poor others, the dipsomaniacs, that he, in his superior way, and from the splendid height of his unassailable sobriety, had been used to look down on, to pity. My God! how he must have fallen! That it should have become expedient to do such a thing for him—for him, John Mount—"Mount, the Model," as his scoffing shipmates had once called him—Mount, the clever, the energetic, the reliable, the "stand-by" of the superintending engineer: the chief always called on to work into order the engines some careless being had let run down. But a short year ago who would have dared dream he would come to this! As in a nightmare the last twelve months passed before him; and he saw laid bare in hideous significance every unnoticed step he had taken on the down grade. He saw the small appetiser before meals doubled, then trebled; he saw the institution of the daily whisky-and-soda with the mate when "the sun was over the fore-yard." He saw himself trying a bottle of beer, for his health's sake, with tiffin and dinner; he remembered the evening he first

let himself be persuaded that his digestion would benefit by a liqueur. He saw how, in the lonely hours of the night-watch, the subtle fascination of the gin bottle had lain in wait for him, had vanquished him: till his solitary night-cap had developed into a one-handed debauch; and he had found himself at midnight talking glibly, in a voice not his own, of an attack of malaria and the virtues of gin-and-bitters as a febrifuge to his wondering "relief." And within the last month, on at least three occasions, he had been unable to keep his watch; and although he had buoyed himself up with the belief that his plea of fever had blinded his shipmates, he could do so no longer. Some, if not all, of them knew his weakness, and in their rough and effective way had tried to save him from himself. And now he—he, who had held his head so high, must face his shipmates, knowing they knew him for what he was. And the strong man—for John Mount, if he had sinned, was no weakling, but a virile, level-headed Englishman—groaned, and cursed himself in the agony of his awakening. Not again for him the comforting cloak of self-delusion. He

swore no childish vows ; he made no good resolutions. But he knew his own mind ; and, his dark hour past, he pulled himself together and prepared to keep his watch. And he had that before him that required all his strength of mind, all his fortitude.

At eight o'clock he went on duty. He put forward no plea for missing his watch the night before ; he had done with such foolishness. Of course it was not for the Third to make remark. Nor did the Third speak to him about the coal ; he had delegated that unpleasantness to the Number One Chinaman.

"Take my tip, sonny. Don't appear ! There's fools, *and* fools ; but there's no fool so foolish as the fool who knows too much." These had been Molly's words, and the Third deemed them worthy of regard, and of his friend's reputation.

The Number One lost no time ; and five minutes after he went on watch a dazed and incredulous chief engineer stood in the coal bunker. It needed no calculation to tell his experienced eye that the quantity was short—a good two days' coal short of what he expected. He hurried to his log-book. Yes,

in Singapore he had taken coal for eight days' steaming; by the book he should have now coal for six days; in the bunker he had but coal for four days: forty odd tons were amissing. He had coaled ship in Singapore—there it was in black and white; but though he racked his head to splitting point he could not recall the performance. Who had tallied the coal? Had he, himself, surveyed the bunker when the coaling was finished, as was his bounden duty? Had he signed the *réceipt*? He could recall none of these things: but only and always the fact that he, John Mount, had spent that day in Singapore—in his bunk, drunk and incapable.

He passed his watch in a sort of stupor of dismay; indeed, his weakened faculties refused to realise the full import of the crisis. At noon he received the customary card from the navigating department stating the day's run and the ship's position; giving in return a form declaring the day's coal consumption and the amount of coal still on board. After a pitiful struggle he filled in the latter quantity as being sufficient for six days, and saw the quartermaster bear off the paper to the skipper knowing he had put his name to a lie.

But it was after tiffin, when his head had cleared and his understanding returned to him, that he saw how fearfully he was compromised. For in the very beginning he was in a pitiable quandary. By midnight the ship would be off Saigon, the last port they could coal at before striking up the China Sea. So now he had to decide whether he would disclose his shameful negligence to the skipper, when the ship would put into Saigon : or trust his luck to carry the *Dragon* on four days' coal to her destination. To put into the French port would mean a loss of two days to the ship, and the buying of coal at inflated prices : followed, surely as night follows day, by an enquiry at the office of his employers, the certain disclosure of his weakness, and his equally certain dismissal. To hold on meant risking the ignominy of being towed into port, entailing the loss of his character and the certificate that gave him his livelihood ; and also, of course, his dismissal. That risk, as affecting him and his only, he was, perhaps, entitled to take ; but the latter course involved more serious risks, and persons for whom to act he had no title. If he went on he risked

nis owners' property, and the lives of his shipmates.

Certainly the latter course held out to the tortured man just a chance of escape, or he would never have considered it. If the calm held and he managed—even although forty tons of coal short—to make Hong-Kong, he knew that by throwing himself on his owners' mercy—"reporting himself," as men call it—and with his long and honourable service to speak for him, he would probably get off with a reprimand. And to retain his position was of the first importance to him. For in Kowloon he had a little wife: a little wife who carried a high head among the shipmen's wives in that suburb beloved of the sea-going community; a little wife who had early given other wives to know that she was the wife of no ordinary five-eight mechanic, but of a Chief Engineer "Extra." Yes, he must chance it. That she should bate her pretty dignity—perish the thought! He saw the sweet lips quiver, the tear in the soft blue eye—the eye he could not meet. The *Dragon*—what was one keel more or less to the Celestial Coasting Company? His shipmates—single men all, and he had the grace to

thank God for it—they must risk their lives even as he did—lest a woman had wet eyes. He saw the little home broken up : the familiar household gods, the curios he had garnered for her from every port of Orient, all their small, intimate possessions redolent of her sacred personality, thrown out to the scoff of an auction crowd. It was unthinkable, while there was yet an atom of chance to avoid it. At midnight the *Dragon*, ploughing a quiet, luminous, phosphor sea, was in nine north, and entering the dread realm of King Typhoon.

It was just at the change of the monsoon, and a dull-eyed morn heralded a breathless, sweltering day. But John Mount thanked the Lord ; another three such days, and he was saved ; and never again, he vowed, would he hand himself over to be so taken advantage of. For the more he pondered, the more fully he was assured that there was a traitor in the camp : that the shortage of coal was by arrangement, or at least due to contributory negligence so great as to amount to the same thing. And the only man who was in a position thus to take advantage of him was the man who would benefit directly by his downfall—the second engineer. He had never

taken greatly to Snyder; the man's appearance and manner were both against him, and John Mount was sensitive in such things. As he had found Snyder quite capable of running the engine-room without interference, they had had small intercourse professionally; and having no other interest in common that Mount could discover, they had sailed a year as ship-mates without becoming intimate. But now he knew him for what the rest of the ship's company had long known him—a "crawler," the meanest thing in any service, the man that will stop at nothing to gain promotion. And he had no remedy; by his infernal indulgence he had handed himself over, bound and gagged, into Snyder's hands.

Another day of perfect calm followed, and John Mount allowed himself to hope. The aneroid in his cabin showed a slight fall, but the chief engineer, the best part of his lifetime a sailor of typhoon seas, was meteorologist enough to know that it was but the regular fall due to the season and the change of latitude. But that evening they had the first sign of a disturbance: the mercury missed its diurnal rise, and there were grave faces round the dinner-table. The



Celestial Coasting Company's records are too sadly full of evidence as to the irresistible might of these hurricanes for the employees to think lightly of tackling one in a deep ship in the open sea, and the *Dragon* was down to her Plimsol with rice. But the mercurial derangement was not sufficient to justify the skipper in going back on his course; and some time in the middle watch they passed between the great coral banks, the Paracels and the Macclesfield—the graveyard for many fine ships, from the eighteenth-century Indiaman to the “tramp” steamer of to-day; and when off the dreaded Bombay reef set a course for Gap Rock, the outpost light for the Island Colony.

The first dull streak of dawn brought John Mount out on deck. Still it was calm as yesterday; but a calm with a difference. The sun rose in a lurid, unhealthy splendour of dead gold and chrysoprase, and discovered a leaden sea straked with a long, slow swell from the east, that told of some wild war of waves away beyond the sunrise horizon. His barometer was down to  $29.70^{\circ}$ ; and, as if that was not enough, there buzzed into his cabin a bizarre, gaudy insect, that the

old China Coaster knew at once to be the hated "typhoon fly." For those great revolving storms send fair warning a day, even two days, ahead of them, to such as can see and understand.

Early in the forenoon he received a "chit" from the skipper, telling him that they were certainly running into a typhoon, and that he expected him to "drive the ship for all she was worth." For they had come too far to dodge the storm; they must either make Hong-Kong before it broke, or ride it out in the open. So now they were entered for that most exciting of ocean races—the race for shelter, for safety, for life.

Still it was with a pang that the chief engineer ran out the expansion, and heard the engines speed up to their highest possible number of revolutions. For gone now was all chance of practising the small economies in coal consumption that might have saved him a few poor tons. But the skipper's orders did him one good turn: he had now a legitimate cause of anxiety; it was no longer necessary for him to suppress every sign of the trouble that had been feeding on his vitals for the last two days. Now he

could visit the stokehold or bunker as often as pleased him without fear of causing undue comment. And the demented man took full advantage of his unhappy privilege, and spent the greater part of his time below, worrying the astonished Chinese fireman, examining every bucket of ashes before it went over the side to see that it contained no least particle of anything that could be utilised as fuel. But when at six in the evening he measured the coal that remained to him, he found that if the ship arrived at all, it would be with clean-swept bunkers.

The night fell, dull, and dead, and starless. The swell had grown but little since morning; and the old *Dragon* swished through it as if she knew she was steaming for dear life. The barometer dropped another tenth; it looked as if the *Dragon* and the storm centre would arrive together at the unfortunate Colony. There was no sleep for John Mount that night. Watch followed yellow-skinned watch in the stokehold; but the big-eyed morning watch that had left him there eight hours previously, found his white-overalled figure still ranging, like an uneasy ghost, from the bunker to the fires, from the fires to the bunker.

The dawn came at last, if such a poor attempt to route the murk of night may be dignified a dawn. Barely a half of the horizon lightened ; sea and sky to the east and north remained banked up in black and awesome gloom. Then a low, gusty wind moaned down on them from the north, flattening the smoke from the *Dragon's* funnel out on the sea astern, and starting a speckle of white caps running across the inky swell. Though now well on to the fishing grounds not a single brown sail relieved the dark monotony of troubled waters ; the junk-men have their own mysterious ways of foretelling the approach of the feared *tai-fung* (great wind).

Shortly after daybreak the *Dragon* ran into a rain-squall ; and thereafter, through alternate rain and wind, drove on into the teeth of a steadily-freshening gale from the north. Now was the crucial hour ; for if the weather did not clear somewhat, it would not be possible for the skipper to pick up the land, and they would have to ride it out in the open after all. And they had not sufficient coal to give them an offing. The weary-eyed man, pulling nervously on an empty pipe by the engine-room door, learned from a despondent second

mate that unless they made a land-fall by noon, the "old man" had determined to put the ship round. And the smother was every moment growing thicker; only for a few minutes between squalls could they see half a mile.

It was now eleven: another hour—that it would only hold off for another hour! Quite despairing, but with this prayer at his heart, John Mount turned away to get what satisfaction he could from measuring his wretched coal heap. Then, in his darkest hour, came relief. A shout from the second mate brought him back on the run to the side of that now excited navigator.

"The land—there's the land!" he yelled. "Great Captain Cook! It's—it's the big Ladrone—already. Twenty and odd miles of current have we had with us since our noon sights. We'll spend to-night behind Stone-cutter's Island with the 'pick' down." For a beam of silver light had cleft the gloom to westward; and there, rising out of the sea, loomed a great brooding mountain, with the flash and sparkle of waterfalls streaking its bulky blue.

Late that afternoon the *Dragon* steamed through the Green Island Pass, and across the

squall-ridden harbour—empty now of everything but its tiers of mooring buoys—to the typhoon anchorage ; where, between a towering Pacific liner and a ghost-white German mail, the humble coaster came to an anchor. That night it blew great guns ; and a mishandled Chinese warship drove ashore, and half a hundred junks went down, drowning half a thousand boat-people ; and the roaring dark was filled with flying boat-covers, and ventilator cowls, and torn canvas, ravished from the half-million tons of merchant shipping huddled in the bight. But John Mount slept the dreamless sleep of the mentally and physically exhausted, knowing naught of these things, but only that he was safe in port, with two tons of sweepings in his bunkers.

Next day John Mount “toed the mark” in the superintendent’s office ; and had the enormity of his offending explained to him with a biting point and ironic fluency of phrasing that stayed in his mind till his dying day. He returned to his ship with the strange remembered feeling that again he was a boy at school, and had just been through a painful interview with the “Doctor.”

The second engineer also interviewed the

“Super”; and so highly did this reader of men think of Mr Snyder’s cleverness that he opined his talents were wasted in his present employ. A hint from such a quarter being as good as a command, Mr Snyder resigned, and the C.C.C. knew him no more. But one evening, some days later, the third engineer and his friend Molly met him in the tourist-haunted billiard room of a great hostelry. And because of a remark Snyder made anent his late employ, there arose between him and the Third an unseemly fracas. Snyder departed in an ambulance, and the Third was led away singing between two Sikh policemen; and came off to his ship next morning declaring that never had he paid a fine with greater joy.

All this is years ago now; but since that trip no man can say that he has seen John Mount touched with liquor. And to-day the wise-aces of the China Coast tell you that he will be the next Superintending Engineer.

## DEAD RECKONING

IN appearance he was in no way distinguished. Nine men out of ten, taking account of his physique, his clothes, and his rather warm colouring, would have set him down as a clerk or a shop-assistant with a taste for athletics. The tenth observer, if he had noted his slow, steady eye, his set mouth, and his assured manner, would have called him shipman; and if he had gone so far as his hands—the square nails, the digit missing on the right, and the hard little mounds at the base of the capable fingers—would surely have named him sea-going engineer. For though the pig-tail, the bell-bottomed pants, and the nautical roll have departed along with the stun-sle booms and the dandy-funk, the sea still sets her mark on her children, plain to read by such as know and love the breed.



His name was John Furnace, and he hailed from Sunderland. His father before him had used the sea. He also had been an engineer ; only a "shovel" engineer, it is true, but still the first chief of the first steamer that the then young firm of MacDryve & Prosper had despatched from the port. Ten years later the firm owned thirty good, sound, up-to-date cargo tramps, and old John Furnace was their superintendent. He knew nothing of the higher mathematics ; he had, in fact, just enough book-learning to decipher a store indent and sign his name at the bottom ; but no least item connected with the building and upkeep of hulls and machinery but was to be found in his great, grizzled, old head, and he could get more work out of a smaller shore-gang than any man on the North-East Coast.

But if he himself had no theoretical knowledge, he was far from blind to its great and increasing value to such as would rise in the engineering world ; and he determined that his son should not labour under his father's disadvantages. So young John was apprenticed to a famous firm of Newcastle engine builders, and was encouraged to pass his evenings — which he did when without the wherewithal

to admit him to the gallery of the old Tyne theatre — in the class-rooms of the Durham College of Science. And when his five years were ended he possessed pasteboards certifying a certain—not very abstruse—knowledge of mathematics, and steam, and applied mechanics; and old John was content.

Then old John packed young John off to sea in the worst ship and under the hardest-case chief in the employ, where it might be trusted that his education would proceed apace. In the beginning young John kept watch all night, and worked all day, and had no time to himself even to be sea-sick. For a month he wished he was dead; then he asserted himself, figured on the official log for half-killing the second engineer, and went ashore and had the time of his life in Buenos Ayres. Thereafter the sea claimed him; and he settled down to the life that knows not settledness, and carefully forgot all his theory, except the insignificant, antique, and entirely useless section required of such as would possess Board of Trade certificates.

So at thirty-five he had climbed no higher than chief engineer of one of MacDryve & Prosper's steamers—not the newest one, by

any means, either. She was called the *Capella*; and for the twelve months before we board her she had been on time charter to a well-known Eastern house, running to their orders between the myriad picturesque but noisome ports of the China Seas. But now their charter was ended; and they were every hour expecting orders to load for home. And none of the ship's company was more jubilant than John Furnace; not that he particularly disliked the Far East, but he was on home wages, and to sail for sixteen pounds a month when the Coast pay was thirty hit John's sturdy North country belief in his own value a nasty, biting blow.

So when the skipper came off with the news that the charter was renewed, and, worse still, that they were to load emigrants for Peru, winged remarks barbed—like the arms of Jupiter in the Latin school-books of our youth—with blue fire coruscated about the roomy decks of the old tramp. The white crew promptly availed themselves of their latter-day privileges. They went on strike; they assaulted their officers; and half an hour later they had faded, sandal-wood trunks and sea-baggage, out of the story in

the police launch. The officers, of course, stayed on—to have left would have cost them twelve months' pay; and next day six depressed and weary-looking Chinese were passed over to John Furnace as his engine-room crew.

That forenoon the officer in charge of the emigration department boarded the *Capella*, explained the requirements, and departed; and the skipper, the mate, and John Furnace sat down to try to realise this thing that had befallen them. At last, and when the day was far spent, the skipper voiced the situation.

"It's no use bucking, boys; let her rip," he sighed. And next day an army of Chinese carpenters, and boilermakers, and fitters boarded the ship; and for seven days there was pandemonium about the decks and in the engine-room of the old *Capella*. At the end of the week her builders would not have known her. Great, glaring, *outré* erections of China pine, poor, rough, and gnarled as any ever rafted down the West River; hospitals, store-rooms, galleys, lavatories, stuck up in all likely and unlikely places; fowl pens, sheep pens, pig pens, all

of the most temporary description, cumbered her roomy decks. From stem to stern the 'tween-decks had been fitted with bunks — bunks that collapsed if you merely expressed the intention of climbing into them. On the bridge-deck, forward of the engine-room skylight, stood an imposing-looking, distilling plant, guaranteed by the patentee to make twenty tons of fresh water a day, but which John Furnace proved to his own dissatisfaction was really good for about two tons — when once it had been persuaded that sea-water was not exactly what was required of it. And when he had vanquished the distiller John Furnace had a scrap lot of second-hand pumps and half a mile of galvanised iron piping thrown at him, and was told that he must guarantee so many tons a day of fresh water delivered on deck, and salt water for sanitary purposes simply by the ocean.

“And who in Hades is going to look after all this extra truck at sea?” growled the Second, a Dutch-built Liverpudlian with a cast-iron aversion to hard work.

“You, of course—you, Mr Skyte—who so fit?” said John Furnace.

"And who's to see to the donkey-boiler when we're distilling?"

"You again, Mr Skyte — when you're off watch."

"Me—me again! At that rate I'd like to know when I will be off watch. I wish to heaven I had left with the crew!"

"Then why in flames didn't you?" flared out John Furnace. Tempers were short these days aboard the *Capella*.

Next day the passengers boarded her, and the ship went under to the rush of a crowd of yelling, fighting Chinese coolies, raked from the slums of Canton, and Foochow, and Amoy, but for the nonce clean and pale: clean with the cleanness of such as have been through the pitiless steaming and scrubbing process in vogue on the sanitary hulk, and pale with the paleness of unfortunates who have just emerged from an unexpected ordeal — their first bath. Then followed the counting and medical inspection; and while yet the setting sun wove a shimmering gauze of red and gold before the blushing face of the mountain-climbing city, the *Capella* was shearing into the shadowy waters of the Lyeemoon Pass, and Hong-Kong was left behind, and they

were off on their ten - thousand - mile trip across the atoll - studded latitudes of the Pacific.

The very first morning out there was trouble. The drinking water did not agree with the stomachs of gentlemen brought up on the brown, sustaining fluid of South China's rivers, and John Furnace awakened to a tremendous clacking of hard - wood slippers overhead, and the shrill complaining of many high - pitched voices. He turned out to find that the coolies had stormed the bridge - deck, and were interviewing the skipper. That gentleman in his pyjamas held a post of vantage on the bridge ladder, while half a hundred savages held up chow basins of water for him to sample, and hooted at him. John Furnace knew that the water, coming as it did from the cellular bottom, was bound to be fairly brackish. So, having some sympathy with the coolies, and seeing that the skipper had the row well in hand, he turned in again. For, indeed, John had troubles of his own to look forward to, and was acting on the good old sea maxim: to store up sleep while yet you may. The firemen had proved themselves absolute

incapables, without knowledge of their duties or physical strength to perform them. John had spent all his own and a good part of the middle watch in the stokehold, and it looked as if he would have to live there right to Callao. So when, half an hour later, the skipper broke in on his slumbers to inform him in his most official manner that the ship was only making five knots, and that if he, as chief engineer, could not guarantee something better, it was his intention to put back to Hong-Kong, John's answer was pat and to the point.

"Right you are, Captain. Best thing you can do. Put back; get a new crowd of firemen—and a new chief engineer; for I'll be shot if I leave port again on any such excursion as this. I'll do my best to get her along, but I'll guarantee nothing. Six white men to a ship of this size is few enough, but six things like these here are a fair mockery. Hand over some of your sailors to trim coal, if you're in a hurry."

The skipper took the situation to *avizandum*: with the result that the *Capella* kept her nose pointing eastward; three unwilling Chinese deck hands were chased with ignominy down



the fiddley, and the speed crept up to seven knots. At that rate the passage would last sixty days; and there was exactly sixty days' provisions on board. The skipper saw trouble ahead—plenty of it; but, as this is the normal outlook of the men in charge of the ill-found, under-powered, undermanned tramp steamers that maintain—by God's good guidance, and the cliff-like strength of their bluff, unkindly hulls!—the sea-carrying trade of to-day, he soon had himself in hand, ready to meet the fortunes of the moment, and content to let the future wait.

It is only the innate and distinctive common-sense of the Chinese race that makes such a voyage as this of the *Capella* possible. That seven white men, be they ever so warlike and so well armed, could by force uphold discipline among six hundred coolies chosen for their muscular fitness is not to be thought of. But the coolies know that it rests with the white men to bring them to their destination; they endure cheerfully what to their way of thinking seems mere intentional vexatious officiousness—the sanitary and other regulations of the ship; nothing matters so long as each day brings them nearer to the El Dorado, limned

so cunningly by the emigration touts, but that for eighty per cent. of them means but a few years of mortgaged labour, then death from fever or the chances of a mine. The coolie ship, in truth, makes her passage by favour of her passengers; and the owners know it, the authorities know it, and the men who man her know it; yet every week a ship leaves some Chinese port for South Africa, or South America, or Hawaii; and the insurance companies risk their money, the authorities some small shred of reputation, and the men of the merchant service their lives. Which, of course, is but an equable division of the sacrifice we all must make to that great fetich—Britain's Trade Supremacy.

But from the beginning the passengers of the *Capella* seemed possessed of a special devil that banished all sense of reason from among them. They fought among themselves, and the Bengali ship's doctor used up all his bandages and sticking-plaster the first night out. They fought with the native crew; and one of John Furnace's unreplacable six had his value sadly depreciated in the labour market. The second meal served to them they threw overboard, and

only the strenuous intervention of the seven white men saved the cooks, their countrymen, from a like fate. They objected to move their mats to allow the decks to be washed, and there followed a frightful scrimmage from which two of the mates emerged with broken heads.

The skipper saw that in their present temper there was nothing to be done but humour them. The washing of decks was abandoned, extra rations and a free pump were the order of the day. Though a storm of complaints and insults greeted his every appearance he kept his temper, and cautioned the other Europeans as they valued their lives to do the same. For he had learned through the interpreter—who was also the comprador, or man who contracted to provision the ship—that in addition to the usual percentage of gaol-birds there was aboard a number of the reform, or Young China Party, and these would surely be possessed of arms, although a hurried, perfunctory search of their baggage in Hong-Kong had discovered none. Before sailing a cheap Belgian revolver had been supplied to each officer and engineer ; but now the skipper, fearful that under provocation some one might draw his weapon and so precipitate a fight with firearms, collected

the revolvers and locked them up in his cabin. This did not greatly trouble John Furnace, who was something of a sportsman, and privately possessed of a shot-gun and a large Colt's pistol; but the others did not like it, resenting the want of confidence the action implied more than the actual fact of being deprived of their weapons.

To complicate matters the comprador's staff, who had been working in terror of their lives, now refused duty. As that meant that the coolies would go unfed, no time could be spared for persuasion other than that of force; and the strikers were simply flogged to their work, and one of the mates posted over them with a club to encourage them to cook the evening meal. A pleasant ship for all hands was the *Capella*.

While on watch that night John Furnace reviewed the situation. The result of his deliberations was peculiar. He left the engine-room; and when he returned a quarter of an hour later it was evident he had been on a foraging expedition. He bore a tin of corned beef, the remains of a ham, and a napkin full of scraps of soft bread and broken biscuit. This provision he stowed away in the locker

where he kept the old brass. Next, from within the breast of his boiler-suit he took a long-barelled revolver and a box of cartridges, and placed them in the writing-desk on the starting platform under a used-up log-book. Then he winked solemnly at the high-pressure engine: John Furnace was prepared. When the Third relieved him at midnight he received his instructions; and the Third, a sprig of Canning Town nobility on his first sea trip, and with a touching belief in his resourceful Chief, promised obedience, even while his eyes grew round and his colour faded at the thought of what might be before them.

“Don’t get rattled, my son!” said John, when he saw the symptoms. “The coolies, excited as they are at present, will doubtless cool off in a day or two; and you’ll be able to josh me about the stale bread and the ham bone—and welcome, too. Still, you know the old proverb—better sure than sorry. And I’ll sleep sounder now I know we have the ham bone to fall back upon.”

The night passed without untoward happening. John Furnace went on watch again at 8 A.M. An hour later the sounds of a disturbance of unusual dimensions came to him down

the skylight, and with the idea that another white man on the spot might come in useful, he went on deck. He found the coolies in a yelling, angry mob crowding forward, many bearing samples of the rice that had just been served to them, and which was plainly the cause of their dissatisfaction. A terrific angry jabbering sounded from forward, and John climbed the ladder and ran along the bridge-deck then completely deserted. Hardly had he arrived at the top of the forward ladder, and taken in the situation, than he found himself fighting for his life.

Next, he was in the engine-room, hanging on to the hand-rails, sick as a dog, with no remembrance as to how he came there, but only the sensation that he had just awakened from a terrible dream. He saw a sea of evil, gibbering, murder-inflamed faces crowding in on him, and himself striking at them in the blind, futile madness of fear. There was a flash among the crowd, a smell of gunpowder in his nostrils; and then the skipper's white-clad figure swaying strangely and slithering to the foul deck, to disappear beneath a surge forward of the yellow fiends, even as the poor man's parrot cry—"Keep your temper, lads!"

still rang in his ears. From a corner of his eye he saw a crowbar descending on the curly head of the little Cockney second mate, and again through a forest of straining yellow limbs he saw the same head, but like a turnip that had been under a cart-wheel. He had a vision of the big, raw-boned Shields mate laying on lustily with a fragment of awning spar he had wrested from a coolie, and ever fighting warily towards the bridge ladder. The coolies fell away from the fighter, there was a flash from their front, and a small red stain on the white gauze singlet over his curved chest. A look of wonder wiped out the rage on the murdered man's homely face; and then the world went dark to John Furnace. The last thing he remembered was falling in behind the bridge ladder, and when the curtain lifted he was below.

The steam had gone back, and the engines were just moving and no more. Overhead on deck a weird quiet had fallen. The third engineer sat on a paint drum, his face in his hands, and his humped-up shoulders heaving pitifully. The sight of him, and a sudden chattering without the engine-room door, brought John Furnace to his senses.

"The Second—where's the Second?" he demanded, and shook the youngster.

"They caught him coming out of his cabin door," quavered the poor boy. "One of them shot him in the back; and when he stopped they knocked him down and danced on him with their clogs. I saw it—oh, my God!—I saw it," he cried, and sobbed anew.

"Here—drop that, mister!" said John Furnace, managing to assume a fierceness he was far from feeling. "Be a man; and we'll yet come out on top. They can only go for us by the ladder, and one at a time."

Even as he spoke a number of coolies entered the engine-room and clustered at the top of the ladder. Fresh from the sunlit deck they could distinguish nothing in the gloom beneath them, while the engineers could see them perfectly. The foremost was a stout ruffian without a cue; in his hand he flourished a small nickel-plated revolver.

"That's 'im—that's the man who dropped the Second!" whispered the fearful Third.

"Ah! one of the reform demons; I'll cook his goose!" ground John through his set teeth, as he drew the long Colt from the



desk, steadied it across his left fore-arm, and swung the muzzle upwards.

The big Chinese was doubtful of the silence. He paused on the top step, his head flung forward, while his narrow, beady eyes, merciless as the eyes of a beast of prey with blood in his nostrils, searched the gloom beneath. "If he stays where he is I'll let him go," whispered John; "another step and I shoot." For a long minute he hung there; then there was the sound and bustle of remonstrance behind him. He peered; he swung himself this way and that; he stretched himself; he crouched and peered again; then his hand slid forward on the rail, and his foot left the ladder. The report rang through the engine - room with the volume and reverberations of a volley. The soft-nosed forty-five calibre bullet took him square between the eyes, and carried the back of his head with it. The corpse pitched down the ladder as if it had been a bag of sawdust, gave a few fearful spasms, and quivered into stillness. His following fell back incontinently through the door. The smoke of the explosion trailed up through the gratings to the skylight. John Furnace

turned and shook hands solemnly with the Third, and the two fell again to watching the ladder. The hardly-moving engines groaned, sighed, shivered, and came staggering to rest. A waiting, listening hush brooded on the engine-room.

Five minutes of silence, of painful expectancy went by, then John Furnace spoke. "I do believe they've had enough for the present," he said. "Now, if they would only leave us alone for six hours we'd be able to defy the whole half-thousand of them. Just trot into the stokehold, and see if there's any firemen on watch."

The Third obeyed, but dubiously, and as if he hardly liked the commission, and was back in a moment with news that the stokehold was deserted.

"Just as I thought," said John, and cursed his crew; "the pigs have joined their murdering, piratical countrymen. Well, now we know exactly who we can depend on—and that's ourselves. Now, my son, we'll prepare to receive visitors; so get a good grip of yourself—remember you're working for your life, and to revenge the poor chaps lying dead on deck. My God!—when I think of them this

morning — as good-hearted and genial ship-mates as ever sailed from the Tyne. And now — I tell you I feel like screwing down the safety-valves, firing up, and sending these fiends, the old ship, and ourselves straight to the devil. But there's another way; we'll try that first."

"But don't you think the bliters might leave us alone, now?" queried the Third wistfully.

"Not a chance of it, my son," replied John, with what appeared to the Third a most unnatural content; "not so long as we stand between them and the fresh water. Has it never struck you that not a man on board can so much as wet his lips unless we permit it? and the coolie that gets a drink on this ship gets it over my dead corpse. They don't know it yet, but we have them on toast—the whole murdering gang of them. Now get the tools out; the brutes won't tumble to it till the tanks on deck are empty."

The two men turned to, taking down a pipe here and a pipe there, altering, bending, mending; working always with the fevered energy of men whose lives depend on their speed. All afternoon they plied hammer and chisel

and spanner and file; and all afternoon the *Capella* bobbed and wallowed on the glistening tropic swell, and the coolies slept or grumbled together beneath the awnings. It was midnight before the engineers had completed their preparations; and then, morally certain that the coolies would venture nothing during the hours of darkness, the tired-out men indulged in a few hours of badly-needed slumber.

They were awakened by a huge outcry on deck. The grey light hanging above the skylight told them day was breaking. "Take the gun, and stand by to stop stragglers!" cried Furnace, as he hurried across the engine-room, and posted himself by a stop-valve on the newly-erected piping. They had not long to wait. Half a dozen gesticulating figures passed through the doorway. To John's disgust two of his precious firemen were in the lead. For a moment the shadowy silence beneath daunted them. But another half-dozen pushed through the door, and those in front perforce began the descent. The gaping two-inch steam-pipe pointing straight for them told them nothing. To the Third this that they were about to do seemed a terrible thing; but John Furnace had only and always before him a fair curly head

exuding blood and brains. It was still black-dark below ; but he could distinguish the dim figures of the coolies on the ladder outlined against the dawn beyond the skylight. There, the ladder was crowded—now ; and he ran up the wheel of the stop-valve without a quiver of compunction. There was a whistling, screaming, ear-splitting roar ; and quick death, in the shape of steam and water at a hundred and fifty pounds pressure, fell on the jabbering crowd on the ladder. Of them all only the rearmost left the engine-room, and from his screams he also had been better dead.

John Furnace shut the stop-valve, and called the Third with him into the stokehold to escape the scalding vapour that now filled the engine-room.

“That was a fair knock-out,” panted the Third, mopping his brow nervously with a paint-cloth. “I do hope they’ve had enough.”

“Serve ’em right, the brutes!” said Furnace.

“But you don’t think they’ll have another try, sir?”

“Who knows?—they must do something. They can’t hang out long without drinking water in this climate. Well, if they’re fools

enough to ask for it, we can only repeat the dose. Now, cheer up, my son ; and back we go to the engine-room."

The coolies had evidently had enough for the time being, and John Furnace set himself thoroughly to realise the situation. That the steam would serve to beat off the enemy again, and perhaps yet again, he thought probable ; but that five hundred able-bodied men would give themselves up to die of thirst without at least one united desperate effort to come at a drink was unlikely, and daylight showed up the one fatal flaw in the defences. Besides the door there was the skylight, a rectangle some twenty feet square that no steam-pipe could entirely command, and that only needed a rope to be safe ingress for any man of ordinary activity. Ropes were to be had for the picking up ; and it was hardly to be expected that the coolies would see and use such an obvious means of throwing an overwhelming number of men into the engine-room. No ; sweat his brains as he might, John Furnace could see no way out of it. They might succeed in killing a certain number of their enemy beforehand, but that they would be eventually overpowered was not the less certain. Thus concluded

John Furnace; and so what wonder if it was with a feeling of relief he greeted the voice that shattered meditations ever leading to such a cheerless conclusion.

Again the voice demanded him. Furnace answered; and after an extended interval the ship's comprador appeared in the doorway, cringing and fearful, and evidently looking every moment to be annihilated by bullet or steam.

"That's far enough. Tell me what you want!" said John Furnace, thinking there might be some trick in this to take them off their guard.

"Oh, Mr Chief Engineer, this is a very sad business. The poor Captain——" began the spokesman; but Furnace was in no mood to receive what he fully believed to be mere affectation of sympathy, and a gruff—"Say what you want to get out!" cut short the effort.

"The coolies are very sorry, sir."

"Are they?" said John, and laughed a hard laugh; "they'll be more sorry before I've done with them."

"They would like you to pump fresh water on deck, sir. They have not had one small drink all day."

"No; and they'll not get one small drink while I'm alive—you tell 'em that!" said John, thinking it well to show a bold front from the first. For whenever he heard the comprador's voice, he had guessed that a truce was to be suggested; and, greatly as he wanted it, he would not hurry matters, for he knew that to be effective the peace must be arranged on his own terms.

"But if they do not drink, the coolies will all die—and me, too," said the comprador. The idea was evidently painful.

A coarse but effective answer will occur to any one—it did to John.

"I go—I go—the coolies I will speak to," the voice wailed, and the doorway was empty.

"I think we've got 'em beat, my son," spoke Furnace, in a hoarse whisper that somehow carried his exultation right across the engine-room.

"D'ye really think they'll leave us alone, sir?" cried the Third.

"Ay, that I do—at least, I hope so," hedged John, fearful of arousing in the youngster hopes that might not be fulfilled.

Half an hour passed, and again the comprador blocked the doorway. "The coolies



do not want any more fight, sir," he cried; and the engineers were hard put to it to believe in their good fortune.

With both parties desiring peace a working agreement was not difficult to arrive at. To follow the negotiations stage by stage, to endure the inelegant sea lingo of the one and the voluble but unidiomatic government school English of the other, is surely unnecessary; it suffices to know that an hour later all was settled, and that these were the terms of agreement.

The voyage was to be abandoned. Furnace was to take the ship back to Hong-Kong. The crew were to put themselves under his orders, and as far as might be the discipline of the ship was to be carried out as when the Master was alive. Furnace was to be allowed the rest of that day to dispose of the dead. He was to get underweigh that night, and he was to endeavour to make the port during the hours of darkness. He was not to fly the police flag, or make the night signal, or in any way hinder the coolies from making their escape. And both parties were vowed to keep the peace, and to work together to bring the ship safely to Hong-Kong. Thus was it arranged;

and as the sensible ones among the coolies seemed to understand that in a strict adherence to the terms lay the only chance of saving their lives, the engineers considered there was just a possibility of yet bringing the ship and themselves out of their terrible position.

"Cheer up, my son! Just show a stiff upper lip to those devils, and never fret but you'll soon see the Marsh again," said John, as he set his face to the ladder, well aware that for all the comprador's assurance he might be mounting straight to eternity.

But to his relief he found the coolies so disposed about the decks as showed they meant no further trouble; and although a sullen murmur greeted the white men on their first appearance, they were allowed to go about their business unmolested. That they hurried to see how it was with their shipmates needs no telling. They lay as they had fallen. But, alas! a moment, and they knew that the first and only duty required of them was the last duty of all; and that already, in that torrid clime, was that duty long enough delayed. So followed a painful hour we need not dwell upon: which, by reason of the inveterate repugnance of the Chinese to handle

a corpse, was prolonged to utter weariness for the two white men who had to dispose alike of European and Asiatic dead.

John started the deck hands to wash her down, and then he and the Third took time to snatch a hurried meal ; for to keep the ship going would require all their energies, and they had not found the ham - bone and stale bread particularly sustaining. A puff at the pipe ; and then, wonderfully refreshed, John turned to what he knew was quite liable to prove his Waterloo—the navigation.

He climbed on to the bridge-deck, and the Third followed, more for company's sake than for any interest he had in the matter. If the Chief said he could find his way back to Hong-Kong, the Third had no doubt of his ability to do so. They passed into the chart-room, which in this case was also the Master's cabin. Evidences of the dead man's occupancy were all around : the pictures of his wife and children on the bulkheads ; his slippers on the floor ; the novel he had been reading and laid face down on the settee when he went to his death. The little place seemed strangely quiet, and an uncomfortable feeling that they were intruding fell on the two men, and they spoke in whispers.

It seemed to them as if at any moment their late commander might appear and ask what they did there.

John only required a chart of the China Sea and the log-book, and these he found ready to his hand. While not at all vain of his knowledge of navigation, John was sure he could set a course if once he had an idea of the ship's position. He had heard the skipper say that their track lay between Formosa and Luzon, so he had little trouble in locating on the chart the dot enclosed in the small circle that represented the position at noon on the first day out. This position he verified from the log-book. From noon till the engines stopped at 9 A.M. was twenty-one hours. Twenty-one hours at seven knots was, roughly, a hundred and fifty miles. From noon, according to the log-book, they had been steering south seventy east; so John took his courage and that treacherous tool known as parallel rulers in both hands, and eventually achieved an erratic pencil-line across the white, reproachful surface of the chart. Then he took a hundred and fifty miles on the dividers, and, holding his breath conscientiously, laid it off from the noon position along the line.

"There she is—that's the spot," he panted, and straightened his back, and regarded his work complacently. "Easy as falling off a log, my boy. See there: that's where we are now; and that's the courses we made getting there. Now, to return to where we started from we must steer exactly opposite courses—that's self-evident. 'Navigation's an exact science,' as one old man I sailed with used to tell me. He had once taken the Lizard for the Longships, and piled himself up in Mounts Bay, so he knew all about it. Ay, an exact science."

"Blime, and so it is!" said the Third, scrutinising the chart with admiring interest. "But why can't we make a bee-line?"

"Why—because of these here scratches in the form of a horse-shoe. Them's rocks, my son—rocks. That's the Pratas Reef; and I remember reading that all inside of there was chock-full of pirates. Now, just at present we've more pirates than we've any use for on board; so we'll go back the way we came. Of course, there's such things as currents that play the deuce with the most scientific navigation; and then there's deviation of the compass; but we'll let it go at north seventy west to

begin with, and trust in Providence and Sir William Thompson that we're not out more than a handful of degrees. So hump yourself and get her underweigh ; and I'll look out for her topside."

John Furnace climbed on to the bridge. Ten minutes later the little tinkle that told him the Third was ready sounded in the telegraph standard beside him. John rang down "Full Ahead." The engines moved, and looking anxiously aft he saw the white spray from the propeller kicked up against the dull gold of the tropic sunset. The *Capella* described a wide half-circle of frothing silver on the copper sea, and John told the quartermaster to steady her on her course. Then he came down from the bridge with the warm glow at his heart that comes to the man who, greatly doubting of himself, has tackled an unwonted task, but now feels assured that success will crown his effort:

As in most tramp steamers, the engineers of the *Capella* had to do their own oiling, and while on watch their presence was required constantly in the engine-room. So, greatly as John Furnace might have desired to keep a look-out on the bridge, he knew that his

duty to the engines made that impossible. All he could do was to give the Chinese quarter-masters the course, and trust that they had the knack and the will to keep her heading there or thereabouts. He posted a look-out both on the fo'c's'le-head and on the bridge; and having warned them, if they would escape every penalty known to the lurid fancy of the mercantile marine, to keep their eyes peeled, he went below and relieved the Third. John's day's work had been quite sufficiently heavy, so it may be believed that when, after another five hours of the engine-room, the Third relieved him at midnight, he had no sooner rolled into his bunk than he was asleep.

When he opened his eyes the white sea-glare of a cloudless tropic morning burned without his port-hole. The *Capella* was sliding steadily across the little waves of a light monsoon. Full of his responsibilities, he hurried aft to consult the patent log. He found that during the night the ship had averaged seven and a half, or half a knot more than he had expected.

When John went below he took with him a copy of Norie's "Epitome," with the brave

idea that he might be able, in the intervals between his rounds of the machinery, to sweat up enough navigation to take the ship's position at noon. But John found that even the most elementary of the mysteries—taking the sun—was hardly to be mastered in the spare moments of one watch, even if that watch lasted six hours; and that, indeed, half the watch had passed before he had found the required page in the monumental tome which, with more enthusiasm than judgment, he had selected as his introductory handbook to his sadly-deferred study of navigation. Of his mathematics he found he retained but the cane-bitten-in memory of the *Pons Asinorum*, and a hazy idea of Simple Equations; but neither end of the Asses Bridge rested on Hong-Kong, nor if he began—"let  $X$  equal the distance"—was he any nearer solving the important question of how far the ship was from the haven where he would be. How willingly would he have swapped the remnant of his useless lumber of theoretical mathematics for a knowledge of the use of the tables at the end of the Epitome, of the Nautical Almanac, and of the handling of the sextant: knowledge that half an hour's instruction from a practical



navigator would have made his own for life. At the end of the watch he had acquired a most vile temper and a splitting headache, but of navigation just enough to know that dead reckoning would most reliably serve their turn, at least for that day.

At 2 P.M., by John's calculations, he had run his hundred and fifty miles, so he altered the course to north forty-five west to fetch Waglan, the leading light for Hong-Kong. The weather had every appearance of keeping fine; they had sighted nothing nearer than a far occasional smoke-trail on the horizon; a perfect peace possessed the coolie passengers, the Chinese quarter-masters seemed to be doing their duty conscientiously; so surely John Furnace was justified in thinking that all went well aboard the *Capella*, and that her acting master was about to distinguish himself.

When he came off watch at midnight the wind had died away, and the stars twinkled weirdly warm and large over the quiet sea. Ah, had he but been able to read their message what heart-burnings had he been saved in after years! The moon was up, and many lights bobbing yellow in the

moon-haze told that the fisher junks were out, and John's mind was easy; for all shipmen in the East know there is no bad weather about when the junks keep the sea. If his calculations were correct, he would be some twenty miles off the outlying islands when day broke; so he gave orders to be called at five o'clock, and turned in, and Fortune remained kind even in his dreams.

It was bright morning, and the *Capella* was steaming in through the Lyeemoon, and he was on the bridge. In the midst of a great company of resting ships, he brought her to an anchor. He interviewed the Agents; he was interviewed by a reporter; he became the hero of the water-front. Then he was at home. He stood in the owners' office, and old MacDryve himself was thanking him, and shaking him by the hand; while his father, the hard old "Super," was standing proudly by, for surely his no-account son had at last redeemed himself! Then he was in the office of the underwriters: many friendly faces beamed upon him; he was clapped on the shoulder, and cries of "Good boy, young John Furnace!" sounded in his ears. He saw a tall, bald-headed man leaning forward over

a table, and nervously swinging an eye-glass. Now the tall man was speaking, and his speech seemed mostly to consist of three phrases—"most meritorious services," "specially deserving of recognition," and "immense, awh—pleashaw." In the next picture the tall man was handing him a cheque and a gold chronometer watch graven with the inscription :

" Presented to  
Mr JOHN FURNACE, Jr., Chief Engineer,  
s.s. *Capella*,  
for sucessfully navigating. . . ."

There was a tremendous shock, a series of sickening vibrations, and John sprang out of his bunk in time to see all his drawers shoot out on to the floor, and his photos taking flight from the walls of his cabin. For a moment—silence ; and then—pandemonium. John sang out to the Third to stop the engines ; and, seizing the lead, fought his way forward through the fear-crazed, yelling coolies. The moon had set, a fine rain was falling, the night was black-dark. But there, black even against the dark night, hanging right over the fo'c's'le-head, was a great mountain

that he knew to be Tam-Kan Island, and the *Capella's* stem was high and dry on the rocks. Some treacherous current of the China Sea had sped her twenty miles ahead of her log. With a curse John hove the useless lead far into the night.

Late in the afternoon of the same day a ship's boat, down to the gunnel with the last of the *Capella's* company, pulled in wearily through the Lyeemoon Pass. John Furnace and the Third sat in the stern. The Third was full to overflowing of this their adventure; but the Chief's face was not encouraging. But once past the restraining shadows of the big brown hills the Third let himself go.

"Well, by jingo!—talk about rotten bad luck, but this 'ere of ours licks creation. To think as you and I, sir, just our two selves, took on all these 'ere niggers like what we did, and then went and got the knock-out from a bally old island! Would it have made any difference, sir, if you had knowed more bloomin' navigation?"

John looked hard at him, but the boy had evidently said it in all innocence. "All the difference, my son," sighed John.

"Then, by thunder! if I don't think it's good

enough for us engineers to learn navigation. What do you say, sir?"

"Surely, boy — for you," said the Chief wearily. "For me?—I don't think so."

For John Furnace knew that the chance of his life comes but once to any man.

## THE PASSING OF PAN-FAT: COAL-TRIMMER

IN appearance he was the most unheroic figure the Western eye could conceive, yet, when the chance of his life came, he found it in him to die promptly and efficiently. What his Celestial sponsors named him deponent knoweth not, but the third engineer, a facetious Greenockian, with an ear for euphony, nicknamed him Pan-Fat, and thus was he known to his fellows in the stokehold of the *Glenroyal*, in which razeed and unsea-worthy remains of a once famous liner he fulfilled the necessary, but unremunerative and filthy, duties of coal-trimmer.

The sun was setting behind the trumpery mountains and tremendous coal-sheds that rim the anchorage at Moji—the Cardiff of Japan—when Pan-Fat came on deck. The stokehold crew had finished their harbour job of sweeping tubes early; and the remainder of the

working day Pan - Fat had devoted to the business of keeping out of the way of the second engineer—and the two feet length of stinging “Tuck’s Packing” that always went with him: a task which his Celestial cunning and a knowledge of the ill-lit intricacies of the old ship’s boiler rooms had enabled him to accomplish satisfactorily. So it was a fresh, though ragged and grimy, young Chinaman who spread his filthy self on the teak-rail the sailors scrubbed so carefully every morning under the critical eye of the ancient Norseman who acted as mate.

Across a quarter of a mile of sun-gilt ripples Pan-Fat considered the land of the geisha and the lotus—and Shimose powder and Murata rifles. Behind the coal-heaps were hills—nice little hills dressed all in the greenest of green scrub, right up and over their little green crowns. There were little valleys with glimpses of little white paths winding through their greenery, and dotted with blue-grey roofs singly and in clusters. Away where the coal-heaps ended there was a large, hospitable-looking village of neat, wooder doll’s houses, and a sea-worthy sampan lay at the foot of the fo’c’s’le gangway manned by

two gentlemen in blue kimonos who invited him in a persistent, if slightly ironic, croak to "Go 'shore!" It seemed to him a good land, a land worth investigating; and in the tobacco-tin, at the bottom of the pig's-skin box that held his few but treasured belongings, were the two dollars he had won at dominoes from the compradors on the trip up the China Sea. So when, in the fo'c's'le, he heard some of his mates proposing to sample the delights of the beach, he determined to attach himself to the expedition.

The after-glow was melting into the blue of night, and a great pale moon was sailing in a sky of impossible mauve and turning all the ripples to silver, when they set out. Two of the comprador's staff, two firemen, and Pan-Fat formed the party. Five entirely contented Chinese sailormen, their minds set on the joys of the shore, they left the ship. Five well-turned-out Chinese sailormen, too; for each had pants of silk, a good cloth jacket, and an umbrella. And each sailorman's queue was most beautifully braided; and each sailorman puffed a rank cigar.

They left the ship in a hired sampan, the envy of their mates; they returned singly,



and at distressful intervals, swimming, and were hauled on to the gangway by their wondering countrymen, and stood disclosed on the moonlit fore-deck, mere bundles of rags, affronting the silent night with their howls. To the number of four they made their dripping *débuts*; and when, after an agonising wait, it seemed certain that the moon-haze shrouding the dreaming waters was not to yield up the fifth of their party, the entire crew uplifted their voices in a hair-raising wail that woke the sleeping harbour and every outraged echo of the shore. And when, as a consequence, a great voice fell among them demanding why, in the name of many variegated and unprintable things, they made that "gottverdommed hullypulloo," as one man they trooped aft, swarmed the lower bridge ladder, and finding there, in pyjamas and long cane chairs, the two mates and the chief engineer, proceeded to voice their grievance collectively in a high, shrill yell. Order having been brought about by the business method of kicking all down the ladder except the four chiefly interested and the Bo'sun, the mate allowed the last to disclose the trouble by

politely inviting him to "Sphit it out!" The response was a flow of disjointed "pigeon" English that would have been double-Dutch to any but mariners of such extended Eastern experience as happily manned the *Glenroyal*.

It seemed—to give the gist of the touching tale unfolded by the excited and tearful old Chinese—that a trouble had arisen between the festive party and the sampan-men about the fare. At the landing-stage the argument had developed into a sanguinary scrimmage that resulted in the speedy and pitiable discomfiture of the Celestials, who found that umbrellas were of small account matched against oars and bamboo boat-hooks. Their stalwart enemy had finished up by bundling them neck and crop into the harbour, and inviting them to swim off to their ship: which invitation, backed up as it was by every inducement the business end of a boat-hook could afford, they had perforce accepted. They had all made the voyage safely except Pan - Fat; poor Pan - Fat must have been drowned. And again they would have voiced their regard for their lost shipmate, but the mate would none of it.

"Try up, I tells you! Long-tailed sons

of guns, shall I talk-talk-talk all night?" he growled, and menaced them with a fist like a shoulder of lamb. "In the morning I get the Shap police; they'll soon find your Pan-Fat. Now go for'ard; and if you wakes me up mit any more noise—ay, shust so much as one weep—I vill lay every mother's son of you out for tead. Now—get!" They got, and in silence, for the mate was known; and if any think that he was unduly harsh, be it recorded that justice only must guide the European officer controlling Chinese crews, if discipline would be upheld. To sympathise is to be misunderstood. So much sympathy, so much weakness, says John.

A vague, misty dawn brought off the usual flock of creaking coal-lighters, and a blue-gowned crowd of laughing, chattering coolies—men, women, and children. These broke into gangs; rickety stages, so old and worn, and experienced and adaptable that they almost seemed to rig themselves, appeared in position; and in ten minutes the little baskets were travelling from the lowly lighters up the high sides of the old ship and across the decks to the hatches, and at twenty different places the small black "nuts" were

pouring, like water from as many pipes, into the holds.

Half an hour later, when no sound was heard but the not unmusical "*Ha-hmn, ha-hmn*" of the human elevator that was loading the ship so expeditiously, a masted, cabined steam-launch disgorged on to the gangway ladder four stiff-built little gentlemen, in uniforms of German exemplar, blue with white facings, and wearing each his little brass-sheathed sword. These enquired for the mate; and, coming to that worthy's cabin, the leader of the party, who carried himself with a certain repressed hauteur and unconscious air of command—probably his only heritage from a thousand years of fighting *Samurai* ancestors—asked in intolerably exact English what was wanted: for the mate, true to his promise, had flown the police call-flag at daylight. Quickly he was in possession of the trouble. The Chinese concerned told their story. The officer asked many questions, and a boyish-looking member of his force filled many pages of a little book with mysterious hieroglyphs. Then the officer, taking the mate's arm, walked him out of earshot of the others, and there, on

the sun-charged bridge-deck, discovered the fate of poor Pan-Fat.

"I—we—knew all this already," he said, tapping his comrade's note-book.

"The tevil you did!" remarked the mate.

"Yes, it is our"—a long pause, during which he considered a doubtless familiar hill-top as he might have something that had grown up during the night—"it is our *duty* as police of Japan to know things. Last night from your ship five Chinese came ashore. They fought with the sampan-men. Moji sampan-men are bad men—all bad men"—he swept his pencil round the harbour comprehensively—"bad men and good fighters. Your Chinese are liars: there were only two sampan-men. Two sampan-men flung five Chinese into the sea. Five Chinese swam away from the hatoba, so if only four Chinese arrived at your ship, I am afraid one——" And he referred the mate to the glistening quarter-mile of water that lay between them and the shore, and smiled—the urbane, deliberate Japanese smile that means anything or nothing, that not even a Lafcadio Hearn can always resolve or understand.

A moment of surprise, then a spasm of

disgust convulsed the mate's hard features. "Mine Gott! more troubles. This vill have to be reborted. Now shall I have to spend all my watch below ink-shlinging, and all for one bally fool Chinaman. Vhy was I go to sea? Vhy was I not a missionary?"

"Ah, yess—me—I understand," sympathised the Jap; "yess—very much I understand. You must write reports to the English police in Hong-Kong, eh—many reports——"

"Miles of them. Miles of plue papers must I cover," spluttered the mate.

"Ah—s-so. I am sorry; but"—absently, and still carefully examining his particular hill-top—"I think this business could arrange itself, eh?"

The old Norseman glared at him, then his face relaxed, and he indulged in a hoarse chuckle. As was remarked previously, he was not new to the East. The Jap turned, now one large smile.

"Yess, there is here no British Consul; so what we do is only *your* business, and—*my* business. Now, if I can get these Chinese to say that this coal-trimmer who now, ah—*is not*, became so through, ah—through an accident, will you say all right? You see,

the sampan-men are much afraid. If the Chinese make trouble, likely the magistrate will send them for three years to dig on the railway; and to dig—for a waterman, it makes his back almost to break. So they will pay each perhaps a hundred *yen*—which will be very good for the coal-trimmer's relations, will it not?"

"It vill, it vill," affirmed the mate, with complete conviction; "two hundred dollars—it'll be a fortune to them. Go ahead! Fix it up like you say. And ven you've finished, come to my room; I have some Kirin beers, and some Manila cigars, good as you never see in this country."

As the officer had suggested, so eventually it was arranged. But not till far on in the afternoon. Not till after a glorious argument. Not till one of the stokehold crew had discovered that the late loudly-lamented was a relative—was, indeed, his "young blother"; and had evidenced his fraternal feeling by the proper number of dramatic paroxysms of sobs and tears. Not till the police had several times sampled the mate's hospitality, and their faces had acquired the roseate tint that distinguishes the eternal snows on Fuji-San

at dawn. So the Chinese received two hundred dollars as settlement in full of the claims of the heirs of one Pan-Fat, coal-trimmer; and in return signed a deed certifying that the aforesaid Pan-Fat met his death by misadventure. And just at sunset the *Glenroyal*, her plimsol disc awash, passed slowly out through the shining Shimonoseki Straits, dropped her pilot at Rokuron, and faded out into the night haze on the Yellow Sea. But Pan-Fat—poor Pan-Fat!—stayed behind.

In due time, and without adventure, the *Glenroyal* came to Swatow, her port of discharge. And on the evening of the third day the mate, smoking an after-dinner pipe on the lower bridge, saw the *Dragon*, one of the Celestial Coasting Company's boats that had been loading at the next buoy in Moji when the *Glenroyal* left, pass up the river and make fast to the C.C.C. pontoon.

That night, at the dreary midnight hour, a cross and sleepy third engineer tumbled out of his bunk, pulled a "boiler-suit" over his pyjamas, and made his way to the stokehold to see his watch "set the fires away," for the *Glenroyal* was to leave on the morrow.



With only the poor, smoky flame of a hand-lamp to lighten the chill, opaque darkness, he stumbled about on his routine, cursing in turn, and with equal verve and fluency, his fate and the shadowy shape of the silent Chinese oiler who attended him. The fires were lit, and soon a soft red glow from the six furnaces dispelled the chill and the darkness. The Third took a last look round before going on deck. The fireman of the watch stood in the glow of the fires, and in a dark corner could be distinguished the figure of the trimmer energetically shovelling coals on to the plates. One of the men flung open a furnace door, and a bright light shot out into the stokehold. The Third had turned to go, but paused with one foot on the ladder. As seen now in the clear light that trimmer's back seemed strangely familiar. It could not be, and yet—— Little chills chased one another up and down the Third's spine, and the hairs lifted the greasy cap on his head. Then he took a pull on his nerves, and, with a shout to hearten himself, strode across the stokehold. The stooping figure rose and faced about, achieved a spasmodic salute, and remarked in placid tones: My have come back, sir."

And behold! he that was lost was found: he that was drowned was alive again, for there, an ingratiating smile on his grimy face, stood Pan-Fat.

He seemed to consider his resurrection such an ordinary affair as hardly to require explanation. When the sampan-men had flung him into the sea he had swum to the wrong ship, the *Dragon*. Her firemen were his "velly good fliends," and with them he had stayed and made the voyage to Swatow. As to why he had not rejoined his ship on the morning following his immersion, he offered no excuse, except the good old stand-by that he was a "litty sick." That his mess-mates might have mourned him as dead had evidently entailed an effort of imagination beyond his powers. What wonder if, in face of such paucity of explanation, and the fact that at the cost of a five cent. sampan fare he might have passed from the *Dragon* to the *Glenroyal* at Moji, the unsympathetic and sceptical officers and engineers of his ship concluded that he had lain low of set purpose—that, indeed, the affair had been a carefully thought-out scheme to victimise the Japanese.

On one point only was Pan-Fat clear—

that the money belonged to him; and the very fact that his right was conceded by the elders of the crew without demur confirmed the Europeans in their contention. And when the ship arrived at Hong-Kong, Pan-Fat and his two hundred dollars, minus the liberal "squeeze" deducted by his self-appointed executors, went unobtrusively ashore, and the stokehold of the old *Glenroyal* knew him no more.

Thus passed Pan - Fat; but not to the Western Paradise, nor yet to the Yellow Springs—the heaven and hell of his degraded Buddhism—but to a cheery corner shop in the river suburb of his native city of Canton, where, wearing a spotless white jacket and an everlasting greasy smile, he counts out weirdly-decorated cakes to a circle of admiring customers.

## PETER LENNY'S PROMOTION

"OPEN her up, Mister Lenny—and get a move on!" said the second engineer; "the Chief wants a turn out of her."

It was late in the afternoon of the last day of the "long lay-up"—the fortnight's overhaul that the Celestial Coasting Company, and all steamship owners with a knowledge of their business and respect for their property, afford their ships once a year. For the past two weeks the *Dragon* had been in the hands of the Dock Company, and for fourteen days and fourteen nights the creak of rope blocks, the tap of the caulking tool, the birr of the ratchet-brace, and the steady clang of the chipping hammer in the hands of a myriad Chinese mechanics had made a noisy pandemonium of her engine-room. At all hours of the day the monster hook belonging to the hundred-ton sheer-legs that straddled far out over the ship

had been rising and falling through the dismantled skylight, bearing uncouth shapes of iron and steel, of name and use known only to the elect, on their way to or from the engine-shops. Fitters, boilermakers, coppersmiths, carpenters, platers had clattered up and down the sounding iron ladders, each gang bent with single mind on getting finished with their own particular job, and quite careless if they blocked the whole work of the engine-room, half-killed a dozen fellow-workers, and did a hundred pounds' worth of damage, so that they gained their end. Dock Company's draughtsmen—superior youths in tweed suits and high collars—had measured and sketched and calculated regardless of the tumult; Dock Company's foremen, quick-stepping, irascible men in khakee, had sweated, and shouted, and sworn at their stolid Chinese "Number Ones," and wrangled one with the other. Portly, shrewd-eyed gentlemen, that men said were Insurance Surveyors, had poked about leisurely, candle in hand; and once the engine-room had been cleared of the shouting horde, and Peter Lenny, the third engineer, startled by the quick-fallen quiet in the middle of the working day, had looked up from his job behind the

condenser, to see the Chief and Second, laden with a superfluity of new wax candles and clean hand-rags, attending with studied-deference a sharp little man wearing an autocratic manner and blue overalls, whom instinct told him must be that dread being—His Majesty's Surveyor to the Board of Trade. And now the moment was come to test the Chief's calculations, the Second's supervision, and the Dock Company's workmanship. The last adjustment had been made, the last nut screwed up, and they were about to take the ceremonial turn of the engines that experience has taught owners to require before the ship leaves the hands of the repairers for the loading berth.

Except a pair of weary-eyed but watchful Dock foremen only the ship's staff were now below. A gentle sizzle of steam and the warm, clean smell of engine oils had displaced the raucous gabble and fleshly odours of the Chinese workmen. The thermometer stood at a hundred and ten, but the electric sense of the presence of power robbed the heat of all oppression. All that day, with emery cloth and bath-brick, the engine-room crew had striven to work off the rust and filth

accumulated during the overhaul, and get something like a proper polish on the engines ; and now, in place of a dismantled, dejected, unsightly, unmeaning mass of iron, the great machine towered up in the centre of the engine-room, complete, shining, ready, alive. Peter Lenny stepped woodenly from valve to valve, his mind full of his routine. The Second started the little, quick - throbbing reversing engine, and the six tall eccentric-rods moved solemnly to the front, bowed slightly, and then retreated into the gloom beneath the cylinders,—a performance they repeated at regular intervals, as if to say : “Look at us! We’re all ready, anyhow.”

For a moment the Second eyed their working carefully ; then, with a catch of his breath—for he was but young, and this was his first overhaul in a responsible position—he gave half a turn to the big wheel that admitted steam to the cylinders. Nothing happened. He gave the wheel another half - turn. Not a move. What could be wrong? In a quick fever of apprehension he reviewed the work of the last two weeks. What could he have done that he ought not to have done? what necessary adjustment of her internal economy could he

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have forgotten? He passed into a sort of apathy of wonder, glaring at the great crank in front of him that seemed as if it would never move again. Then the gruff voice of the Chief broke his stupor with the words: "Give her steam, mister! She's a bit stiff after her fortnight's rest;" and he pulled spasmodically on the wheel.

A sigh, a shudder that shook the ship, then the great crank moved, and with a groan that might have been torn from the heart of a "god in pain," climbed staggering over the dead centre and continued revolving slowly in its appointed circuit. The cross-heads rose and fell in their exact rotation; gleaming connecting-rods with rythmical swing cut the dim light; steam breathed softly in yellow, overgrown copper pipes; pumps sobbed and clacked; but all in the restrained manner expected of them when the speed is "dead slow"; and the ship's engineers passed anxiously amid the living, moving tangle, making sure that every part of the complex mechanism was doing its duty.

The Chief first noticed a default. "The vacuum is not rising as it ought to, mister," he



cried testily to the Second. "Run round and have a look at the pumps."

The Second sped behind the engines, to reappear a moment later very red and dejected. "The air-pump foot-valves are not in place, sir," he said, avoiding the Chief's eye.

"Humph! Who took them out?" asked that personage dryly.

"The Third."

"And what has he got to say for himself?"

"Says I didn't tell him to put them back."

"Great Scott! Poor fellow! Just what he would say. It seems to me that man's head grows thicker every day of the week. And then he thinks I'm down on him because I don't recommend him for promotion. I tell you what it is, the 'Iron Duke'—thus was the C.C.C. superintendent of that day known to an admiring Coast community—"would make it more than any Chief's job is worth to recommend the like of him. And yet I'm often tempted to risk it; he's a decent soul, and a hard-working; and if, as you say, he's to be married next month, the rise of pay would be a godsend. But no, I couldn't conscientiously do it." And the Chief, who was himself a decent soul, if somewhat short-tempered, as a

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man is apt to be whose life-work has been done in a temperature of a hundred odd, shook his grey head sorrowfully and passed away up the ladder.

Peter remained below to replace those unlucky valves, coming in for the rough edge of the Second's tongue as in dejected mood he set about the operation. Left to himself, little sleep would he have had that night; but the Second, having had his grumble out, turned to and gave him a hand. Even so the dinner gong clanged on deck as Peter screwed up the last nut.

"There, sonny; that'll do you," said the Second, not unkindly; for the year they had sailed as shipmates had bred in him a certain regard for the simple soul who, whatever his failings, always did his best. "Get your chow and turn in. You'll be called at midnight to keep anchor watch. We'll be shifting ship to the Company's wharf about ten, by the Chief's way of it, but you won't be needed." And Peter slouched off to the mess-room, whistling and of good cheer, the vague sense of unhappiness—the utmost the Second's biting criticisms ever engendered in Peter's slow bosom—entirely dispelled by his later affability.

Well fed, and pulling strong on a cheap Manilla, he sought his cabin, at peace with the world.

Through all the turmoil of the overhaul Peter had toiled, as was his wont, without complaint but without enthusiasm, doing just what he was told, troubling not as to the why or wherefore of his orders, without interest, or indeed comprehension, of the scientific theories whose discussion and application to every item of alteration and repair engaged the Chief and Second so mightily. For Peter Lenny was that most unfortunately placed of human beings—a man who has mistaken his vocation, a mechanic wanting the mechanical sense: the great, new, sixth sense that has been evolved to cope with the uncanny mechanical developments since the birth of steam.

Five years ago Peter Lenny had sailed from the Clyde as supernumerary engineer on a new ship of the C.C.C. After three years as Third in their China Coast fleet, he had managed to scrape through his examination for Second—at the fifth time of asking. A brisk cholera season had brought him his promotion the day after he gained his ticket. But he had only held the position for one short

trip; his Chief had given him such a bad report that the Superintendent had replaced him by the first certificated man convalescent. The downcome had been a shock to him—more of a shock than his shipmates suspected. For one golden evening in his apprentice days a slim, blue-eyed lassie and Peter had disposed a great event to follow on that same promotion; and the home mail following that which bore the good news must needs bear word of his reverse. These last years he had seen many climb over his head; but he had toiled on hopefully, in the solid belief that application and sobriety would gain him his step. But more is required; and “poor old Peter’s promotion” was now become something of a sorry joke among the scoffing juniors on the China Coast.

But just a month ago a magnificent thought had come to him; and a warm wave of fervour had swamped his native caution, and he had acted on it. He had decided to postpone his marriage no longer, and had written to bid his sweetheart come; and day and night since then he had tingled with the thought of his approaching happiness. Promotion might go hang just then, for had he not

money in the bank? and she — poor little nursery governess, slave to the spoilt children of a Clyde-side ironmaster!—the “gorgeous East” and Peter had been for long her promised land. Even now she was well on her way; for, once Peter had closed the door of his cabin, he had taken from his pocket a rumpled yellow paper, which, that he might gloat over it as he undressed, he proceeded to spread out on his desk, weighting it down with a Reid's Engineer's Handbook and a Bible—his entire library, but surely a selection beyond criticism within the limits he affected. The telegram told him that she was come safely to Singapore.

With the expedition of a quick-change artist—or a shipman—he donned pyjamas. Then he pulled out a drawer, and from a cigar-box that did duty as an album reverently lifted a photograph whereon he gazed for a moment, his plain face lit with shining eyes. Then, “Good-night, wee lass,” he murmured; replaced the photo, shut the drawer, tumbled into his bunk, switched out the light, and called on Somnus authoritatively, as must the unfortunates who keep the “graveyard”

watch, and a minute later was in the lover's heaven of dreams.

He awoke with an intense, awesome, vibrating roar rending his ears, and the ship trembling beneath him like a stricken creature. Dazed, fearing the end of all things, he staggered out into the alley-way. Two demented Chinese firemen and a ghost-pale second mate mouthed and raved at him—mere frightful pantomime because of that stupendous noise. Then a waft of steam filled the alley-way, and he understood: there was an explosion in the engine-room. Something of importance had given way, probably the main steam-pipe. Meanwhile the ship was adrift in the Shanghai river, helpless; and down below men were dying, maybe dead. "Never stop to think, laddie. It's fatal. Run to the valves!" The words of old Dougald M'Guffie, the first Second he had sailed under, filled all his sleep-clouded brain. A rush of air swirled the steam out of the alley-way. Peter was not there.

Two minutes later the roar checked a little—grew quickly less—ceased. When the stinging white vapour cleared from the engine-room a couple of shaking mates and some

uneasy Chinese deck hands ventured below. As they reached the lower platform, the Chief and Second stepped out of the shaft tunnel but little the worse. As intelligent engineers they had known that in that particular ship the stop-valves were so unfortunately placed that in case of explosion it was impossible to shut them and live; and the sudden fear of certain death had bested them, as it has many better men.

They found Peter Lenny lying below the wheel of the stop-valve. The agonies this man of one idea must have endured in the endeavour to act up to his ideal can neither be imagined nor described. The ship was never in any danger, for when the pipe burst the ropes had barely been cast off from the wharf. He was taken to the hospital, and all that medical science could do for him was done. Mercifully it was late in the afternoon of the day following that of the accident before he came to his senses, for when he woke it was to torment. The terrible high-pressure steam that leaves no mark, that works not as a vapour but as a deadly gas, had stricken him internally. Twenty-four hours later the agony had worn itself out,

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and he had short intervals of seeming comprehension. Shadowy figures spoke words of approbation and encouragement; and a small, grey rat of a man, set clear in the sunset glare at the foot of his bed, smiled a queer, twisted, unaccustomed smile, and promised him promotion. The word touched some special chord in his intelligence, and for a moment he looked at them clear-eyed. Then a spasm of pain swept the understanding from his face, and, muttering "promotion — second engineer—wee lass," he passed again into a troubled stupor. They spoke of a recovery; but the pale, sad-eyed nursing Sister, the woman of infinite sorrow and tears who has closed the eyes of so many China Coasters, shook her head. And that night, about the hour when the big, darkling junks lumbered down the river on the first of the ebb, Peter Lenny received his promotion.



## THE TALE OF A TAIL-SHAFT

HE was a big man and ponderous withal, but the shock fetched him out of his cabin, and started him down the engine-room ladder as if he had been a boy of sixteen. The engineer of the watch had stopped the madly-racing engines before he reached the starting platform. Even so the cast-iron floor-plates had danced into a dangerous disarray of holes and man-traps during the short but terrific vibration.

The fact was, he had been lying in his bunk wondering how long the shaft would last when the smash came off. The *Samarang* had passed through the Bashee Channel at day-break, and for twelve hours they had been driving her into the eye of a fierce north-east monsoon. And they were in the grip of the Kuro Siwo—the Black Stream of Japan, that makes four miles an hour of Northing, calm or storm. The strife of gale and adverse

current had piled up a steep, short, hollow sea that the chief engineer, with twenty years of sea-going behind him, had never seen the equal of for ugliness. The *Samarang* had four thousand tons of sugar in her holds, but for all the steadiment it gave her, she might have carried a cargo of feathers. Her loaded draught of water was twenty-four feet—ample to preclude all idea of racing in a normal seaway; but now for hours every vicious roller had tossed her stern high in air, and then, while the propeller was still whirling frantically, dropped it thirty feet into the solid brine. What wonder that the engines brought up with a jar that shivered the ship from truck to keel, or that the chief engineer's apprehensions were at last justified!

The bow of the deeply-laden steamer fell off from the gale, and a green sea climbed casually over her much as if she had been a breakwater. Round she came till wind and sea were about four points abaft the beam; and then—oh, miracle unbelievable by old-time sailormen!—there she stayed, shouldering her after-part carefully over the seas, dry as a bone, hove-to by the stern. Her behaviour told her anxious skipper that the propeller

was still with them. A minute later the chief engineer climbed the bridge ladder to tell him that the tail (or propeller) shaft had broken in the stern-tube—the most irreparable happening that can befall a modern steamship.

The Chief subsided on the top step of the ladder, and mopped his large, red, and perspiring countenance. The skipper leant over the bridge-rail. The two men looked at one another. They were old shipmates, old sailors of Eastern seas, and no words were needed to voice the gravity of the situation. They were now in the Pacific to the east of Formosa, one of the most desolate stretches of ocean in the world. And they were in the grip of a current hurrying them at the rate of fifty miles a day into yet vaster solitudes. They were within a week of their destination—Yokohama; and it was hardly to be expected that there was much more than a week's provisions on board. The *Samarang* belonged to the numerous fleet of the Celestial Coasting Company, and Board of Trade law is a dead letter in Eastern seas. So the Coast-wallahs go round on fresh provisions trusting to luck; and when their luck fails them, things happen. Of course it was

understood that they must attempt to repair the shaft, small hopes as they had of being successful. So after a lengthy silence the skipper's lips formed, rather than spoke, the words: "How long?"

The Chief took thought, and then spoke oracularly. "The *Krakatoa's* engineers took three months to the same job, and then they could only trust the shaft dead slow. The *Coilton* drifted about ten weeks between New Zealand and the Horn before they could turn their engines, and she carried eight engineers. To the best of my belief these are the only two successes ever made of the same repair. Of course our shaft is lighter than theirs would be, but then we've only three engineers. I should say from six weeks to two months, Captain."

"Heavens above, man! We'll be eating one another in a fortnight."

"Not a bit of it. We've plenty of water, and plenty of coal, and plenty of sugar, and there's fish in the sea—we'll fetch port all right. It's only a matter of graft." And the Chief arose, all the self-reliant Geordie in him—he was a Shields man—shining in his eyes.

The skipper only stared regretfully at the

black Formosan cliffs, and the twenty miles of angry sea that rolled between. The Chief was quick to read his thought. "No boat could live for five minutes, and this gale's good to last a week," he said; and his voice sounded almost insolently triumphant to the unhappy master.

For now the craftsman's fervour had awakened in this big, slow-minded man, and he had no room for other feeling. He saw that here was his chance of fame—a big repair and his name in the engineering journals—the restricted, but to him the only fame that had any appeal. He knew himself not without ability; once upon a time he had even prided himself on possessing a fine hankering after distinction; but he had judged that ten years as Chief of a China Coaster had put his ambition to sleep. And here, with the opportunity, was the old yearning to rise above the ruck stronger than ever. The man was revived. He had shed a dozen years. Was this the slow-going old shipmate without a thought beyond a long chair and a monthly magazine? The skipper stared at him, and, for a moment, wondered. But not always had he been a steamboat sailor; not

always had there been trained men by him to take the travail off his hands. Again he saw himself the young and energetic mate of a wind-jammer, rigging jury masts off the Horn, and he understood. "Do your best with the shaft, Mr Havis," he said; "and I'll see the deck back you up all they know."

Bright and early next morning all hands were up and about on the *Samarang*. The Chief had explained his plans to his juniors overnight, and managed to infect them with a modicum of his enthusiasm. Like all capable engineers, he had, long ago, decided on the best procedure to meet every possible case of breakdown, and now only the details affecting this particular predicament fell to be arranged.

But their zeal received a trying rebuff in the very beginning. Before they started to the repair, it was necessary to make the outer end of the shaft watertight; but four hours of wild endeavour to lasso the madly-diving propeller with a tallowed cable taught them this was hopeless—at least, until the sea went down. So they must either wait for a calm or jettison sufficient cargo to bring the shaft

above water ; and, although Mr Havis hardly expected the skipper to sanction such an extreme step as jettison so early in the proceedings, he thought it his duty to suggest it. To his surprise the skipper acquiesced at once.

“Go ahead!” he cried. “Get your after-winches underweigh, and dump what you want. It’s up to the insurance.”

The fact was that the steward had given him such an alarming report of the commissariat that he felt justified in going any lengths to see the ship again under control. Half an hour later the after-derricks were rigged, and the great yellow Java sugar baskets splashing into the sea.

All that day the creak of rope blocks, the rattle of winches, and the sing-song shouting of the Chinese crew astounded the sea-birds in that ocean solitude ; and when night shut down, electric cargo lights blazed out over the hatches, and the work went on as before. When day broke the after-’tween-decks were empty, the *Samarang’s* stern towered up like the after-castle of King Olaf’s galley, and the shaft was clear of the water. Now the engineers were free to start on the repair without fear of the ship filling up.

The length of the *Samarang's* shafting that carried the propeller was—as in all screw steamships—enclosed in a cast-iron tube known as the stern-tube. The outer end of this tube fitted into an aperture in the stern post, and the tube extended some twenty feet forward, past the most contracted part of the hull, to the collision bulkhead. The stern-tube has a compartment to itself known as the after-peak; a compartment you may be certain is no larger than need be where space is of such value as it is on a modern cargo-carrier. The *Samarang's* stern-tube was nearly two feet in diameter; and when the three engineers had squeezed through the manhole door from the tunnel into the wedge-shaped space surrounding it, they found they had room to move, and no more. And in the beginning they had to cut a section out of that great pipe of cast-iron to come at the fractured shaft that lay within. With their hands, and such painful tools as chisels and drills, they had to do it, and never room to strike an honest blow.

Even while they considered, what was to be their greatest trouble forced itself on their notice—the ventilation. There was but one



opening into the compartment, and the smoke and stench of the hand-lamps and the want of circulation shortly made the place unbearable. The oil-lamps they could replace by portable electrics : the discoverers of this clean and handy illuminant most surely made mankind their debtors ; but it is the sea-going engineer, wrestling with some titanic task in the cramped and stifling dark of a steamship's machinery space that can truly call them blessed.

But to provide for the circulation of air was another matter. The compartment immediately above them was used to carry fresh water, so that way was barred. Of the triangular space they occupied the two sides were the skin of the ship—and Mr Havis had all a shipman's horror of piercing the hull, even although above the present water-line ; and the base was the collision bulkhead through which they already had the manhole. While the Chief planned and perspired, the skipper's brick-red face blocked the opening.

"Kind o' warm in there, eh?" he remarked genially.

The Chief opined it might have been worse.

"Tell you what it is, gents," the old man

continued after sampling the atmosphere ; “ you’ll never do a decent day’s work in that hole without a breeze of some kind. Now I’ve got a fan in my cabin. It’s the very worst electric fan with Edison’s name on it ever made in Japan, but you might be able to fix it up ; and it’s at your service.”

The second engineer, who was the electrical expert of the trio, was making for the manhole before the words were well spoken. “ Hand over your fan, Captain ! ” said this young and up-to-date Glaswegian. “ She’s going to work now, if she never did.”

Another night of gale and roaring seas was closing down on the disabled ship when next the skipper visited them. Where the noxious hand-lamps had smoked and spluttered were clean and bright electrics ; his long-despaired-of fan, fairly humming, drove the wet, salt air from the tunnel ventilator in on the workers ; and three ratchet braces *chir-ir-ir-upped* merrily. The chief engineer wore a large, moist smile.

Their first care was to locate the fracture, and they had no means of doing this but by drilling holes along the length of the tube, and feeling for the break with a bent wire.

And when they did find it the Chief looked blue. For it was in about as awkward a place to get at as could be: away up near the stern-post, where there was neither room to work nor air to breathe. But with the best face he could muster, he chalked two circles round the tube, equidistant from the break; their task now was to cut out the section between the circles. Their only means of doing so was to drill a series of holes round the entire circumference, and then cut out the metal between the holes with chisels. They set watches, and settled on a routine which would ensure that the drilling went on continuously day and night; and at midnight the first "shift" came on duty, and they were fairly entered on their gigantic undertaking.

A short experience taught them that a half-hour spell was the utmost a man could spend at this trying toil to advantage. So Mr Havis drew on the deck hands till his force was eight men in a watch: sufficient to keep the work going at half-hour spells. Drilling is mere manual labour, and could very well be left to the Chinese; the engineers found work and to spare in dressing the drills that the awkward Celestials broke, and in getting the

gear ready to make good the shaft when they could come at it.

So for a week they worked, and for a week they drifted. They sighted the Meiaco Group; and all of one clear day, to their small satisfaction, the fine, blue pinnacle of Ku-Kien-San was outlined against the white, wind-laden sky; but the nor'-easter never eased up for an instant, and, sorely tempted as he was, the skipper would not risk a boat's crew. They thought to sight the Loo-choos; but the current had more easting than was marked on the chart, and they passed far to the southward. And on the eighth day came trouble.

The native crew on China Coasters find themselves. Their mainstay, of course, is rice; but dried fish, pork, fowls, and vegetables are needed to make up the complex and curious dishes they affect: dishes of an odour sufficient to banish from any but the most enquiring minds the slightest desire to taste them. And now they had made an end of all their "kitchens" and relishes; they had nothing left but rice. Rice would keep them living, but they could not think of working on it. "No got chow, no can work," was John's statement

of his position; and there was something to be said for his point of view. But he had to deal with law and not equity: in his case the unwritten law of the merchant service that says: "Growl you may, but work you must!" So in half an hour he was toiling away harder than ever; and all of him were sore, and many of him were decorated with sticking-plaster. But it took hard driving to keep them at it; and the Europeans were sick and weary of the brutal business before the last hole was through. Only Mr Havis bated not his enthusiasm; and at any hour of the day or night he might have been seen coming from the fo'c's'le, dragging along by the scruff one or more sulky, despairing-eyed Chinese, too dog-tired even to blaspheme.

"It's ferry astonishing how the Chief keeps going, and him such a pig man, iss it not?" said the third engineer, one of the Clan Campbell, and, as the Second said, "gey Hie'lan'."

"It's thinking of the cumshaw we're all going to get from the Insurance that does it," said the Second, tipping the wink to the mates. "What are you going to do with your two hundred pounds, Donald?"

"She'll build a braw, fine, wee 'public' on the Balloch Road, and make her fortin selling whuskey in ginger-beer bottles to the puir bit Glesca' bodies coming oot on bicycles on the Sawbeth," replied the Third, to the undoing of the would-be humorist.

"And it's me that wishes I was in your pub to-day, Donald; 'stead of floating around per-anyhow on a blamed half-tide rock on the road to God-knows-where," said the young third mate dolefully.

"Toots, man! We might be waur off. Put your faith in the Chief—and Donald Cawmill. I'm thinking the high feeding we're getting has affected your liver. Come awa' doon below, and I'll g'ie ye a wee ploy wi' the striking hammer that will do you all the good in the world." And the irrepressible Celt swung over the engine-room doorstep, and faded down the ladder, whistling.

But, indeed, it took a man like Campbell, brought up on the frugal fare of the West Highlands, to face the prospect with anything like equanimity. For the last twenty-four hours the Europeans had been subsisting on flour, rice, and sugar, served in such variety of dishes as the Chinese steward could devise;

and already their stomachs craved for the flesh foods that figure so largely on the Britisher's bill-of-fare all the world over. The skipper had pooled all the food in the ship; and now all hands — Europeans and Chinese — fared alike, and drew their daily ration of flour and rice — sugar, of course, they could take at discretion from the cargo. As the supply of flour and rice was sadly limited, sugar was now their stand-by; and the second mate, who fancied himself something of a *chef*, handed round many frightful attempts at toffee, ranging from the flinty consistency and flavour of plate glass down to the friable messiness of cold porridge—the last redolent of petroleum, because of the solidified oil which, on the recommendation of the second engineer, he had used in place of butter. But of any and all his triumphs they ate largely, on the sailorman's principle that "what doesn't fatten fills up."

The twelfth day from the breakdown saw the drilling of the last hole needed to complete the double circles round the tube. Their task now was to cut out the metal between the holes. And in that ship's company of sixty there were but three tradesmen—men who

could handle hammer and chisel effectively. It was as if a wind-jammer had lost all her sails, and there were aboard but three men who could handle palm and needle.

The three engineers turned to manfully. The mates poked their heads through the manhole betimes ; and even took hold on their courage, and hammer and chisel, and did their best to give their shipmates a spell ; but generally were more successful in knocking pieces from their knuckles and the unfortunate chisels they mishandled than from the glass-hard cast-iron of the great tube. The junior engineers showed a disposition to be witty at their expense, but the Chief would none of it.

“Leave the lads alone. They’re doing their best,” said he. “I’m not saying but that if they had spent a year or two of the five they wasted chipping paintwork and tarring down rigging in learning to handle tools in a ship-yard ashore they would not have been of more use to their owners in a time of stress like the present—but that’s not their fault ; it’s the system ; it’s the fine old fossilised idea that to give a boy some notion of handling ships under sail is the only training to fit him to take charge of a modern steamer with neither sails nor



yards, nor yet enough canvas aboard to make a monkey-jacket for the Captain's cat. But don't discourage them; the little they do is better than nought."

The first day all hands hammered away light-heartedly; and turned in and slept like logs. They awoke stiff and sore from head to heel. But, fit or unfit, there was nothing for it but to turn to, and by six the hammers were going again. They were so pitifully few that even in that confined space they could all find room to work; so they kept "kulashee watch," and the skipper looked out for the ship at night.

Not that he had great hopes of being picked up, but they could afford to waste no chances. The north-east gale had blown itself out by the time they crossed the hundred-and-thirtieth meridian; and thereafter by observation the ship had been making sixty miles a day, N.E. by E. At first the skipper had hoped they might make southing enough to sight the Bonin Islands; but some days of more northerly set saw the *Samarang* drifting fair for the middle of the thousand miles of ocean between the islands and Japan, where their only chance was the seldom island schooner, or one of the few remaining whalers of the North Pacific.

They had worked three days at cutting out when the skipper announced that at the present rate of consumption the flour and rice would last exactly a fortnight. As by no endeavour could the repair be finished in that time, it was decided to reduce the ration by a half. It might have been advisable to keep the workers on full rations, but such a proceeding was sure to have been misunderstood by the native crew, and bred trouble.

The engineers and their helpers were themselves past any remonstrance. The utter weariness due to severe, unwonted, and continued physical exertion acting on their undernourished systems had settled into a sullen apathy; they toiled on in a sort of moving dream. Every morning at daybreak the inexorable Chief thundered on their cabin doors, calling them from precious but unrefreshing slumbers, so broken by spasms, cramps, shooting pains, and desperate nightmares, that it seemed neither mind nor muscles had ever been asleep. With the cuts and blisters on their hands—the legacy of the previous day's work—but half healed, they caught up again the worn hammer shafts and ragged-headed chisels, and their old sores bled anew, and they

raised a fresh crop for company. Their faces also were bruised and scarred, for in that steel-walled grave the flying chippings rebounded and bit like slug shot; and they worked in constant fear that one of the roving, jagged fragments might find an eye.

There was no joking now; seldom even words between them. Only above the steady tap-tapping of hammer on chisel, a growl or a muttered curse when some unfortunate paused to mouth a red bruise on his hand, or get his nearest neighbour to pluck from his flesh a deep-seated iron splinter. In the beginning they had knocked off regularly for meals; but now, after toiling hours in one position, the pain they endured ascending and descending the long flights of steel ladders was more than the reduced ration was worth, and they fed where they worked. So twice between morn and eve there was handed through the manhole a mess of rice, sugar, and water, that any self-respecting rooster would have scorned. But these men ate it thankfully; it stayed a little the void beneath their tight-buckled belts.

The end of another weary week of work, and starvation found the six almost at the end of

their powers. No longer did they keep working hours, but every man turned to at six, and toiled till his arm refused to lift the hammer. But no one, not even the third mate, a boy just out of his "time," knocked under. It was not altogether the sense of duty, nor yet the hope of reward from owners or underwriters, nor even the fact that they were working for their lives, that upheld them; it was rather the dour British sentiment that they had started this thing, and, lest they would be fools in their own eyes, they must carry it through. And late of a Saturday night the last connecting fragment of iron parted; and the great section of tube — they had previously withdrawn the broken shaft into the tunnel—clashed into the bilge.

For the last few days the *Samarang* had encountered light northerly winds and partial calms. That Sunday they would cross the Great Circle track from Yokohama to Honolulu, and the skipper hoped to sight an American mail-boat. But the morning broke with dirt and wind from the south-east, and nothing but the slow-sailing, solitary mollyhawk entered their small circle of rain-bound

horizon. It must have been in a bitter humour that the old Spaniard named this restless sea the Pacific.

But there was no day of rest for the toilers at the repair, for of flour and rice was aboard but enough for another two weeks, and they were afraid to think what it would be like to exist on sugar alone. Now their very souls sickened at the deadly sweetness of their daily fare, and only at the height of their craving for food could they bring themselves to bolt a few mouthfuls. All the efforts of the skipper and of the Chinese to catch fish had been vain.

Now it fell to join the two ends of the shaft together; and this Mr Havis and staff proceeded to do on lines well known and approved of the elect. They drew the two ends close up to one another. They took the top halves from two of the main bearings, and used them as a clamp, screwing them up with their own bolts, cover against cover. They fitted a long key on either side the full width of the space between the sections of the bearings.

It sounds a small thing in the telling. But think—oh, ye shopmen!—of cutting two three-inch keyways two feet long—by hand! Think

of the hundred and one times the great half-bearings had to be lifted on and off the shaft for fitting, and no room to sling a block or use a lever! Think of the contriving, the perseverance, the spirit of never-say-die that enabled six half-dead, wholly-starved men to do the work of a gang of fitters, a key-seating machine, and a steam-crane!

At eleven of a forenoon of a bright, clear day, just thirty and three from the breakdown, a gaunt and dirty figure that none of his shore friends would have recognised as Mr Havis pulled himself painfully up the lower bridge ladder.

"We've finished, Captain!" he cried; and made to wave his cap, even while he stumbled on the top step from weariness. "I've turned her over, and all's right as rain." Then he smiled a smile that fairly cracked the dirt on his haggard countenance.

The Skipper said not a word; he merely grabbed the Chief by the arm, ran him out to the end of the bridge, and pointed. There, rising and falling on the long Pacific swell, was a ship of the Company, a rainbow string of signal flags fluttering out above her fore-deck.

She was only a homely Coaster—but she might have been the Flying Dutchman, Mr Havis eyed her with such horror and amaze. Then a wave of disappointment turned his heart to lead, and he staggered from the bridge, deaf to the Skipper's well-meant condolence. For now all his work went for naught. The Skipper was bound to take the tow that offered. The ship belonged to the same owners as the *Samarang*, and had doubtless been sent to look for them, and so there was no question of salvage; and she was able to tow them eight knots, whereas his repair, he owned, was good and safe for nothing beyond dead slow.

Word of the steamer's arrival was passed below, and six sad and sorry scarecrows foregathered on deck by the engine-room door. For a long minute in silence they looked one at the other. The situation called for splendid oratory, but in their enfeebled state no one felt that he could do it justice. So, still in a silence that said more than many bad words, they went about their lawful occasions.

A week later the *Samarang* was towed into Yokohama, where she was docked and a

new shaft fitted. On her arrival at Shanghai, where is the head office of the C.C.C., Mr Havis submitted the written report required regarding any unusual happening on the voyage. In it he mentioned in a modest way their successful endeavour to repair the shaft, and suggested that the beyond-ordinary energy of the junior engineers and deck officers was not unworthy of some small acknowledgment. He was diplomatist enough to forbear mentioning his own services; he judged that if the others were rewarded, he could not well be passed over.

The autocrat who ruled the C.C.C. deigned no written reply to this effusion, but Mr Havis got his answer through the Superintendent.

"The Boss bids me tell you that he considers you only did your very obvious duty. So you'll get not a cash extra; and you're to be thankful that the firm doesn't charge you for a new stern-tube."

Mr Havis is still chief engineer in the same employ, but gruff, and grey, and grown out of all knowledge. Ambition he has put far from him; but he does enough to keep his position, and he has one yarn



that no Third, particularly the conscientious and pushful sort, can escape—this tale of a tail-shaft, with its immoral moral that there is such a thing as being too energetic. He is popularly supposed to carry in his cabin a year's provision of tabloid foods ; and he has been known—when there was a savour of gin in the land, and the Superintending Engineer was far, far away—to air the awful heresies that the average shipowner is a thankless person ; that the man who works his soul-case out to benefit such is many unprintable varieties of a fool ; and that the next time the shaft breaks, the ship's company will eat it before he asks any man to do a stroke of work beyond the routine.

## HEROES TO ORDER

“So the ship’s chartered for Port Arthur, eh?” said the Second, stopping the red stream of sparks from his pipe with a case-hardened forefinger.

“For Port Arthur, worse luck,” acquiesced the Chief; and continued to stare with unseeing eyes at the towering mountain of lights that is Hong-Kong by night from the harbour. The two engineers smoked conscientiously through a long-drawn-out and thought-laden silence. Then the Second showed signs of uneasiness. He cleared his throat with ostentation. Time and again he twisted round in his chair and looked dubiously at his superior. He knocked the dottel out of his pipe and blew a small typhoon into the bowl. He gave every indication that he was preparing to broach a difficult subject; and as one forcing himself to speak, he broke out

abruptly: "And you, sir? What are you going to do?"

As the Chief turned a spasm convulsed his capable and still young-looking face. "For God's sake, man, don't ask me! You know how I'm placed," he said.

Again a long, a painful silence. At last the Second, a lanky, level-headed Hong-Kong-born boy of thirty, climbed to his feet, took a couple of heavy-footed turns about the deck, and stopped with a jerk by the Chief's chair.

"Don't you go, Mister Canning," he blurted out, half in pleading and half in command. "You may tell me it's none of my business, but—think better of it! We'll never win through. What's nine knots to a Jap torpedo-boat? And then there's the mines. Be advised—don't go! Think of the wife here in Kowloon, and—and the youngsters!"

"Think! Think and go mad!" gasped the man in the chair. "You're a *pukka* Job's comforter, old chap;" and he forced a poor smile that cut to the quick the great-hearted shipmate towering over him in the luminous gloom below the awning.

"But consider, Mister Canning," the Second

persisted. "It's not as if you wanted for friends out here. There's plenty of us—of them, I mean—would be happy to see you through."

"I know it, dear boy, I know it; but I've never lived on my friends yet, nor intend to. We'll sneak through all right, never fear." Then, to get away from a question desperate past argument: "And how about yourself? You take the same risk as I do."

"Me!"—as if it was the greatest joke in being. "Me! I don't count. I'm only a 'hard case.' If I pegged out to-morrow nobody would miss me but my old Jap girl, and you bet she made her pile out of me years ago. And, at any rate, I suppose we'll drop in for a good thing in the way of 'cumshaw' if we make the run."

"Not if Harder, Pokram & Company know it. You'll get your wages—not a cent. more. I pumped the Skipper, and he said old Pokram wouldn't hear of it."

"That's *his* yarn," sneered the Second. "You bet he's made it all right for himself."

"Don't you believe it!" said the Chief sharply. "John Derrick's a white man—as skippers go. Now it's your time to turn in."

You'll be called at four to get steam on the cargo boiler. We start loading at daylight."

"What!—is the stuff coming on board here, in a British Colony?"

"My son, this is the great free port: where you can buy, or sell, or do anything if you have money—as you ought to know. It seems so many cargoes have been run from northern ports that it's getting talked about; so the Slav - Celestial Bank, which finances these attempts, is doing business from here. Don't forget there's no need for you to go if you think the risk too great. You have three days yet to think it over."

"Oh, I'm going right enough—if only for the lark. Think what a champion yarn for the boys in the bar of the Engineers' Club if we win through!" And the irrepressible Crown Colonial sauntered off whistling, and left the Chief to his thoughts.

John Canning had first seen the China Coast as a junior engineer in the Celestial Coasting Company's steamers. Promotion had come to him even before his turn, for he was sober, energetic, and capable. For four years he had sailed as Chief to the satisfaction of his employers, to the credit of his cloth, and to

the admiring content of his shipmates. Then he had taken a year's leave ; and, satisfied that his position in the employ was assured, when bound East again brought a wife with him. Mrs Canning had need to have been a crown unto her husband ; for with his marriage his luck changed. He started with some minor accidents—not his fault, but for which, as head of the engine department, he had to take the blame. Then a drink-sodden Second started the engines ahead when rung astern, and the ship crashed into the Company's pontoon—to the tune of a thousand pounds damage. For this he took a reprimand and a warning. Three months later, through the carelessness of the man on night-duty, the cargo boiler collapsed ; and on the day his firstborn saw the light Canning received his dismissal.

Thereafter he had taken up that most unnerving of occupations — the hunt for a constant job : with such poor success that it began to seem that in the hunt itself he had found it. He did an odd *pro tem.* run in a Canton river-boat ; he got a month's salvage work, at the risk of his life, on a big Geordie tramp ashore on the monsoon-swept Paracels ; he put in a fortnight in the Docks, in place of

a foreman in the Peak hospital recovering from his China New Year *jambaree* ; and at last, after eighteen months of such miseries, and when his funds were quite exhausted, he dropped in Chief of the *Glenroyal*.

She was only the decrepit remains of a once famous tea steamer. Her registered owners were a couple of German Jews, doing the dirty work for a wealthy Chinese syndicate, and known and accursed to all the China Coast community as "Hunger, Poverty & Co." Her engines, as the *Talent* say, "could just turn round without falling into the bilges"; and his pay was five pounds a month less than any respectable Coast company would have offered him; but it was steady employment, and he had signed on with a thankful heart. His skipper, for a wonder, was a Britisher, and, in Coast lingo, a "white man"; and Canning had rubbed along peaceably for three months, though the stores and general equipment down below made him sigh for the old days in the C.C.C. Then came this charter for Port Arthur, and put him in a pitiable quandary.

For this was in the winter of 1904; and for eight months the land and sea forces of the Mikado had been without the gate. The

great fortress was supposed to be in extremity : a supposition that the management of a bloated, banking corporation, the financial agents of the Tsar's government, fostered to their own particular profit, and in the sacred cause—to a Russian official—of the despoiling of “Holy Russia.” For the dashing twenty-knotters that posed so splendidly in tales of the siege lived only in the imaginations of the give-'em-wonders-at-so-much-a-word correspondents ; the real blockade-runners were sadly different craft. Of course, no reputable firm of ship-owners would touch the business ; and now was the chance for the second and third raters to get rid of their ancient maritime curios, and at their own price. So every unseaworthy ballyhoo in Eastern waters was chartered, loaded with a valuable cargo—the more valuable the better, as affording larger percentages ; donned a coat of cheap paint and a senile affectation of mystery and derring-do ; and some fine forenoon lumbered ostentatiously out of harbour to make her eight-knot dash for Port Arthur or Vladivostock. The few attempts that succeeded were blazoned loud and far over the Coast ; the failures were consigned to that quick oblivion awaiting failures in



the history-making East to-day. Indeed, this blockade-running was but a sorry farce—for all but the unfortunates called to play the leading parts in the drama.

For the war had closed ports and laid up ships, and half a hundred hungry Coasters were ready to fill their places. So it was given them to choose between taking the risks of running the blockade, and an indefinite spell of loafing and privation ashore. To such as had wives and families depending on them, the choice was insufferably momentous. What wonder that the man in the deck chair, thinking of his loved ones, started to his feet to blast his luck and the abiding heavens!

Three days later the old *Glenroyal* steamed out through the sun-bathed Lyeemoon, cleared for Cheefoo with flour and general cargo. Her crew went with her to a man, upheld by a stolid scepticism as to the existence of a danger they had never experienced, and an indifferent gift of going on and taking the chances: two unromantic attributes of Britain's seamen that have carried them to greater triumphs than either dash or strategy.

They slipped out of Cheefoo one black and favourable night, just a week later. At the

hour of ten, in a blinding December blizzard of sleet and snow, they hove up the anchor. The riding lights of the shipping, dim-flaring through the smother, slid behind. Out across the squall-tortured harbour the old ship laboured, the freezing spindrift from the little waves blowing in level sheets across her listed decks. In the lee of the Bluff she ran into a quick, dead calm, while the gale moaned high in the night above her mast-heads. A moment, and she poked her weather-hammered stem into the open, and the wind and the wicked short seas with all the send of the Gulf of Pechilee behind them took her full on the port beam.

Then the worn telegraph tinkled softly in the engine-room the "repeat" Full Speed that signifies the ship is clear of the land, and that the engineer is expected to drive the machinery to its full capacity. For an obvious reason the electric light was not in use; a couple of hand-lamps was all the illumination that Canning and his crew allowed themselves; and by their yellow flicker the spacious engine-room of the old liner loomed immense, gleaming, cavernous.

The Chief himself was on watch, for the

fourth engineer had departed with the fancy paintwork, the brass-bound uniforms, and the other glories of her career as a home liner. The Second and Third were in the stokehold encouraging the men by word and example; though, truth to tell, the wideawake Chinese crew needed little spurring, well aware that every extra pound of steam they could raise increased the ship's chances of making the run without interruption. The watches were double-banked for that trip, and the unwieldy tools, rake and slice and pricker, gave the fires no rest; while the scrunch of the shovels, the slam of the heavy furnace-doors, and the continuous shrill, sing-song cursing of the half-naked Cantonese made of each stokehold a contracted pandemonium. An icy, sleet-laden gale drove down the ventilators, and forced the draught till the whole ship vibrated and sang to the quivering roar of the twelve fires. Once clear of the Bluff, the old craft rolled regularly to an angle that only the narrow-gutted traps built in the 'seventies can achieve; and the sweating, yellow grotesques toiling in the furnace-glow balanced and swayed like trapeze artists. Sleep was not

to be dreamt of that night for any of the engine department.

There was no question in the *Glenroyal* of driving the engines at their full capacity, for the extra boilers that had given her the last knot—the knot so proverbially hard to get—in her good days had been taken out to increase her cargo space. But, even so, Canning had doubts if the old and worn-out machine was good enough to run up to the capacity of the boilers remaining. Already she was doing the fifty-four revolutions that he in his experience had always considered her safe maximum. So when the telegraph bell rung it was very gingerly he opened the expansion.

Gradually the tall, slow-moving, long-stroke “compound” responded, speeding up to sixty with hardly an increase of sound—the Second was engineer enough to see that at least the running parts were in perfect adjustment. The Chief stood tense, listening, waiting. His trained senses could distinguish nothing amiss; her beat was regular, rythmical, easy. To the man in sympathy with her, the poor old two-crank seemed to say: “This is how we ran the tea home in seventy-

four, and came in three days ahead of everything: before you, my boy, went to your trade, or your common 'triple - expansions' were thought of. I was the pride of the famous Clyde-side brothers who built me. I might go to smash, but I couldn't run nasty if I tried."

The face of the man on watch relaxed, and he took a turn about the starting-platform. Then a spasmodic access of speed, as she raced to a high sea, gave him a momentary attack of "nerves"; and the crack in the high-pressure connecting-rod, the flaw in the after-crank, the patch on the cylinder casing—all the toiling, worn-out antique's many defects and weaknesses seemed to shout at him together, and he had to lay hold on himself violently to keep his hands off the expansion wheel, so strongly did all his instincts as an engineer call on him to give her a chance—to slow her down.

A moment later the Second pushed through the swing door from the stokehold, balanced to a lurch on the swaying plates, grabbed a hand-rail, and swung himself lightly to his side by the starting levers; and in the presence of that genial and self-reliant Colonial his

doubts were as if they had never been. "Don't she flop round a fair treat, sir!" cried the younger man, running an admiring eye over the engines.

The old ship quivered to a big sea, and then lay over till it was hard to tell whether the floor plates or the fore-and-aft bulkheads were meant to stand on. The Second slid across the slippery plates towards the whirling masses of steel, bringing up nonchalantly with one arm round a column, while sudden death, in the shape of a ton of polished cross-head, flashed up and down within three inches of his brains. "My oath! Don't the old tub do herself proud at rolling!" he remarked, entirely without ill-feeling, as he hauled himself back to the Chief's side.

At his superior's prompting he now took a run on deck, coming back to report no lights in sight, and the night "black as the earl of hell's breeches." The two men passed a moment in gratulation, and even then their trouble was upon them. First a spasm of apprehension chased the smile from the Chief's face, and he pointed a questing nose. The rythmical beat of the engines faltered; they laboured pitifully in their orbit. Then the stench of

burning oil filled the engine-room, and, ejaculating "Oh hell!" the Second grabbed an oil-can, and shot himself down a ladder. The ship thrilled to a painful grinding, and at the hated sound the Chief tugged at his "torpedo" beard and groaned: "The after-bearing—it's all up now!" But he held his hand from the stop-valve; and soon a coal-trimmer, frantically requisitioned from the stokehold, played the hose on the refractory journal, while the second and third engineers slacked the adjustment, and fed it with a constant stream of oil. They found that by unceasing attention they could just keep her going, and with their hearts in their mouths they held on, and chanced a breakdown.

By two in the morning the long-continued strain was telling on the worn-out engines. The framing was working freely, and the Chief knew that collapse was not far off. Then the Chinese oiler, who through all the excitement had been going the round of the oil-cups like a part of the machine, reported the guides to be "too muchey warm," and the man in charge was near his wits' end. And while yet this new trouble lay heavy on him, the second mate—in his spray-sheeted oil-

skins, sou'-wester, and long sea-boots, the figure of an old-time seaman, and looking strangely anachronistical and out-of-place in that realm of steam and applied science—stumbled down the treacherous steel ladders and handed him a note. The Chief read it, and showed an impassive face to the deck department man. "My compliments to the Skipper, and tell him we'll do our best," he said.

Then he turned to his engines, despair at his heart, for there was no question of slowing her down now. Two Japanese torpedo-boats were after them, about a mile astern by the Skipper's computation. Capture, that meant at least confiscation of their ship and loss of livelihood, was very near.

By the unstinted use of sea-water on the over-heated bearings they kept the poor, old entity grinding away for another hour. But the revolutions were sadly reduced; and only the high sea saved them from being overhauled. Then the rolling ceased, and the Chief knew they had run into the lee of Lau-ti-shan. Eight miles to go; but eight miles of smooth water, and the torpedo-boats hauling them in hand over hand. He passed



the next half-hour in an agony, watching the telegraph. And sure enough, just when he judged they must be off the harbour entrance, the pitiless bell rang "stop."

With a last laboured groan the sorely-tried engines came to rest, and the engineers hurried about on the multitudinous duties a stop when at full speed entails in the engine-room. Suddenly a bright, pale light filled all the top platform space above their heads, and they knew that a search-light was playing on the ship. A moment later a quick shudder convulsed the old fabric; and then, to the men below, struck into listening statues, came the near and awful roar of a heavy explosion. An awe-laden silence followed, but nothing happened, and again they hurried about their business.

Suddenly it was borne in on the Chief that the ship was listing rapidly. Then the Second hurried in from the stokehold with word that water was coming through the bulkhead from the hold. Evidently the ship was badly damaged.

The three engineers came together on the starting-platform. They heard the fear-demented Chinese stokers clatter up the

ladders, yelling and cursing. Shortly it seemed to them that her stern was lifting. Then the telegraph clanged "Finished with engines", and they knew that the end was come; and that the Skipper—"white man" to the last—had remembered the men below, and given them their chance with the rest.

They gained the deck just in time to see the Japanese torpedo-boats speed off into the gloom to seaward, spitting spiteful fire from their stern-guns. There was the loom of high land on their port; and a great angry beam of light from far up was switched off the ship and planted on the dare-devil little craft, and the sea around them spouted and boiled to the hail of quick-fire shell.

The Chief started for the lower bridge, for it came to him with a fearsome shock that the ship was sinking by the head. His heart stopped; already he seemed at grips with that icy Northern sea. On the boat-deck he found the Skipper, trying, in a chill rage of despair, to induce the fear-paralysed Chinese crew to put some method into their efforts to swing out the heavy boats. The Chief tailed on to the same frozen rope, the awful bitterness of the draught he feared to drink tearing from

him the poor wail: "I did think the Japs would have given us a chance for our lives."

"Japs be damned!" groaned out the "old man," as he threw his weight on the fall. "The Japs were harmless. The idiots in the fort there blew the bows clean off her."

The search-lights played on the flying torpedo-boats till a driving snow-squall swallowed them. Then the white beam swung, and explored with demon eye the harbour entrance. But the "cruiser," as the Russian gunners called her, was gone; and the submissive radiance silvered but the solemn, empty, winter sea.

. . . . .

A month later Mrs Canning and family sailed for home; their passage money defrayed by friends of the sea-going community. The firm of Harder, Pokram & Co. flourishes exceedingly. The senior partner is by way of being a philanthropist; and at the Pokram Institute little yellow boys get the knowledge of English and arithmetic that, tempered by their native shrewdness, enables them to beat the white man of commerce at his own game. The name of Pokram even figured for five dollars on the Canning subscription list.

## SALVAGE

THE sight of Maguire's ship hauling in to the sheer-legs early in the afternoon had filled me with foreboding. It was nearing the end of the two weeks' orgy known as the annual overhaul, and in my reduced state I did not feel equal to him. So I hurried over my dinner and fled; after making sure that the quarter-master on the gangway knew I was out of the ship, and that the Second clearly understood, in case a large man with a distinguished Liverpool-Irish accent enquired for me, that I had taken two days' "leave" and gone to Macao.

Irwin, the Chief of the *Queen of Siam*, had asked me to look him up after dinner, and talk over old times. I toiled over ships' decks and under ships' bottoms, between scrap-iron heaps and through saw-pits, across dock gates solid as the bed rock, and swaying planks flung

anyhow over granite-paved abysses: all the colossal disorder of a great and busy ship-building yard. Now I put on speed in the tremulous blue glare of an arc light, again I waded dubiously through a patch of purple shadow. I sped across the floor of the towering crystal palace known as the erecting shop, where the Chinese fitters stuck like flies on the carcasses of a dozen giant marine engines in all stages of dismemberment, and electric travelling cranes crawled about like nightmare spiders away up against the roof. I came out on the edge of the Number One Dock—that opens its sacred gates only to the storied Leviathans of war and commerce. The big white mail-boat looked like a toy ship lying at the bottom of the great granite basin—a toy ship alive with life and lights. I hurried down the sloping gangway, and along electric-lit alley-ways smelling of new paint, to the Chief's cabin. I fell on his settee thankfully; here, surely, I was safe for one evening from the great Maguire.

But my content was short-lived. Indeed, I should have known that to try to escape that man of resource, Saunders Maguire, was useless. Hardly had Irwin and I got our smokes

underweigh than a heavy foot sounded outside the venetian door, and my name resounded along the alley-way. Irwin flung open the door, and behold! he was there. Grey and yellow tweeds of a paralysing pattern loosely clothed his vast figure; and a plenitude of gold watch-chain, a red tie, and a panama gave his costume the artistic finish so evidently aimed at. His bald and shining face wore the largest of large smiles, and he fairly radiated good-fellowship and geniality.

"So here we are, eh—the man that went to Macao!" he cried, and wrung my hand till my eyes watered. "I called on board your ship, and the Second spun me a fool yarn about 'leave' that I reckoned was never meant to hoodwink Saunders Maguire. So I even pumped the Sikh watchmen, and followed ye from point to point till I tracked ye down. And this'll be Mr Irwin, of course—no, I want none of your introductions!—ye'll be the Irwin that repaired the *Queen of Corea's* tail-shaft—it's proud and happy I am to take your hand." Irwin blushed; he is the most modest of men—and chief engineers.

A small man in worn blue serge, with a black, pointed beard and a watery eye, had

followed Maguire into the cabin. To him Maguire now turned.

"Allow me to introduce to ye, gentlemen, Mr M'Arravy, my Second," he said. "He's not just much to look at, nor yet much of an engineer; but he has one good point: he's as deaf as the pillar of salt that was Lot's wife, so you can say what you like before him." Then, in a roar calculated to enlighten the pillar of salt aforementioned: "I'm just telling these gents, Jock, that ye're a stranger to the Far East; and that I like to take ye round and show ye the ropes." Mr M'Arravy gave us in turn a grunt and a limp, clammy hand, and seated himself with elaborate respect on the extreme edge of Irwin's red plush settee cushions.

Irwin set out whisky and cigars.

"Ye have a fine ship, and in a fine trade, Mr Irwin. They do ye comfortable, too; this is something like; eh, Jock?" said Maguire, running an eye of approval round the fittings of the spacious cabin. He rose to give a fine collection of technical books the particular inspection they merited; and while he rolled off the sounding titles I seized the chance to

apologise to Irwin for this that I had brought upon him.

"That's all right, old chap; but what on earth is it?" replied the mail-boat man, to whom Maguire was a new species.

"An old China Coast hand. A good soul, but a bit of a bore, and quite the biggest liar in Asia."

"A large order, eh?" said my friend under his breath; then aloud, in reply to Maguire: "Yes; one of the few books on marine salvage worth shelf-room."

"And it's me that can appreciate it, Mr Irwin, being myself, as ye might say, a bit of a salvage expert. I'm the man that salved the *Druid Hall*."

"Indeed?" said Irwin, with a polite assumption of interest.

"Yes, *sir*. You may talk about your salvage surveyors, but show me the man that, wanting special plant, or pumps, or appliances, or even a pair of hands bar his own, salved a five thousand ton steamer—a steamer, mind ye, abandoned as a total wreck. I ask ye, Mr Irwin, have you ever met such a man?"

"No, nor expect to," said Irwin shortly.

"Then allow me to introduce ye to him.



He sits forninst ye, and his name's Saunders Maguire."

"Now, then, draw it mild, Mr Maguire!" cried Irwin, before I could catch his eye. The only way to escape Maguire's reminiscences is to display a perfect lack of interest and unbelief from the beginning.

"Well, ye see, Mr Irwin, it was like this," Maguire commenced; and I knew our time had come. "I was Chief of the *Druid Hall*, and it was on a voyage from 'Frisco to Manila, on time charter for the U.S. government, that the affair came off. It's not a yarn I would spin to all-and-sundry—here's my oldest friend in the East, for instance, never heard a whisper of it——"

"That bald-headed old lie! You've inflicted it on me every time we've met for the last ten years," I interjected, thinking I saw a way of escape.

"And here's Mr M'Arravy, Second with me for more than a year: I never told *you* the yarn of the *Druid Hall*—did I, Jock?"

Mr M'Arravy took his pipe out of his mouth—he scorned cigars—and considered. "At least twice a month since ever we sailed together," he said.

Maguire glared at him, but only for a moment; nothing less than a club in the hands of a Goliath would have diverted him at this stage from his tale. That it was to be a lie of an unwonted and appalling splendour I knew from the solemnity with which he had seen fit to invest his massive features.

“It was on a Sunday of July, ninety-eight, that we sailed from 'Frisco, loaded down to the scuppers with boots and beer for Uncle Sam's boys in the Philippines. The *Druid Hall* had been three months waiting for a charter when the war broke out, and of course the government snapped her up the first thing. She was a fine-old-has-been of a steamer, but run down to the lowest. Still, she was good enough to carry stores. We lit out in the very deuce and all of a hurry, manned by a scratch crew of whitewashed Yanks—just the most useless assortment of wharf-rats, hobos, and boarding-house-keeper's hard bargains the divil ever raked into one ship. I had to take the shovel myself—me, the chief engineer, mind ye!—to fire her through the Golden Gate. The skipper and mates were 'square-heads,' and poor specimens of the breed at that; and for junior engineers I had a locomotive fireman, a

cable car conductor, and a bummer for Singer's sewing machines—and, by gosh! the sewing machine fiend was the only man worth calling a man in the crowd.

“So, if ye were to tell me, Mr Irwin, that we didn't break no records across the Pacific, I wouldn't argue the matter. We had only two speeds—one was ‘dead slow’ and the other was ‘stop’; and six and a quarter knots was our average. And if the engine department was rotten—even with me, Saunders Maguire, in charge—I ask ye what would the deck be like? The knock-outs in the fo’c’s’le just laughed at the Dutch mates, and worked or loafed exactly as it suited them. The skipper had enough sense not to attempt Great Circle sailing, and so for nigh on a month we jogged across on and about the twentieth parallel with blue skies and calm seas. But at last, when nearing the Ladrones, we struck a succession of little gales, that blew from all round the compass. And in the height of one of them, in the middle watch, the blamed galoots ran her slap on a coral reef, and—and not a pub within a thousand miles.”

Maguire paused, and gazed thoughtfully at the whisky. Irwin took the hint so delicately

presented, and, after an evidently refreshing interlude, Maguire proceeded :

“I shot into my clothes, and down below. There was not a drop of water in the engine-room—nor yet a single man of the engine-room crew. I promised myself some fun when I got hold of them. But when I got on deck I allowed to let up on the poor devils. There they were all bullocking and yelling round the boats—deck and engine-room together—and says I to myself, if ye’re fools enough to get into these rotten old coffins in the sea that’s running now, God forbid that I should say wan angry word to yez. The ship was safe as a house—hard and fast on the reef—as I tried to tell them. Of course, what with her snout being right up in the air, her stern under water, and every sea sweeping the after-deck, and all in the black dark and the howling wind, things looked much worse than they truly were—as an old sea-going man like myself could realise. A good steel ship—and the *Druid*, if ancient, had been one of the best—takes, as ye know, a power of pounding; and I’m never tired of preaching, Mr Irwin, against the madness of rushing the boats the first

thing after a ship takes the beach. So help me, I've seen the folly of it so often. When the engineers tell ye she's breaking up—the frames always go first in the engine-room—it's time enough to think of the boats. But they wouldn't listen to reason; they were bound to go the way they went. And what ye might expect happened. The forward tackle of the first boat they lowered was not unhooked in time, and one half of the ship's company shot into eternity. 'God's mercy!' says I, 'if so be as ye must drown, go away and drown where I will not hear yez'; and I turned to and slacked off the falls of the other boat myself. 'Jump for it, Mr Maguire,' they shouts, when the boat was fairly afloat: which was more than I expected of their gratitude. 'Not me,' says I. 'Are ye stopping on the ship?' says they. 'I am so,' says I, 'with the boots — *and* the beer. Good luck to ye, boys! I'll see ye all back to the ship in the morning.'

"And, indeed, so I hoped and thought at the time; but, poor lads, I was mistaken. I never saw them again—no, nor yet any one else. I misdoubt the bottom fell out of their old ark before they were a mile from the ship.

What could ye expect of a soft-wood boat after twenty years' roasting in the tropics?

"So there was I, left all by my lonely in the middle of that misnamed waste of salt-water—the Pacific. For half an hour I considered the ship, and the more I considered, the more certain I was she was there to stop. There was not so much as a tremble in her; she might have been built there by the coral insects she was resting on. So I turned in—my room being on the bridge deck, and clear of anything in the way of water heavier than spray; and when next I opened my eyes it was bright daylight and the wind gone down.

"You bet I was out of my bunk and up on the bridge like a shot. Not a sign of anything worth seeing was in sight, only a cantankerous swell of a sea bubbling and twinkling clear to the horizon. A patch of broken water here and there showed we had struck a *pukka* graveyard for ships, and away on the clean-set Eastern sea-line, a pair of cocoanut trees stuck up black against the sunrise red. That was all; and if ever I felt melancholy in my life, it was then: that morning on a bleeding old wreck on a reef in the Pacific.

“I soon discovered that all the good I got out of staying up there staring at nothing was no good at all—meaning the hump; so I went down to the saloon and skirmished round the pantry till I got together a square meal. Then I had a draw on the pipe; and then I fell a-thinking. All of a sudden it struck me that it was most powerful quiet. ‘It’s this big, empty, God-forsaken saloon,’ says I, ‘that’s give me the pip. I’ll go on deck.’ But there it was worse. The swell had gone down; there wasn’t a breath of air about; the old *Druid* lay like a corpse on the beach; and, before I knew what I was up to, there I was howling at the top of my shout, and chucking things about the decks: anything to dishipate that infernal silence. At last I caught hold on myself. ‘This won’t do, Mister Maguire,’ says I, speaking this new man that was me extra polite; ‘try the saloon again. Take your reflection in the mirror for company!’ But when I came to the glass, bedad, I had to look twice before I knew myself—faith, I was the worst-scared-looking engine-idiot that ever came out of Bootle. ‘What ye want, friend,’ says I to the thing in the

mirror, 'is a drink, and a big drink at that, and the sooner the better.' Now I knew there was nothing in the ship—barring always and excepting, of course, the beer, and that was in the lower hold with two hundred tons of boots on top of it—in the way of stimulants but the medical comforts; so medical comforts it was. The door of the medicine-chest was locked, but that was small hindrance; and in a quarter less than no time, I had my hands on them. One bottle of brandy and one bottle of port was the ship's stock: may the devil send sorrow to the sowl of the sinner that had the fitting out of her! I tried the brandy, and that put me on the road to recovery; then I tried the port, and I felt better still; but it was not till I tried them half-and-half that I was really convalescent, and able to look my single-handed future in the face with confidence. I put the bottles carefully back again; not that there was a great deal in them, but what there was would come in handy in case I had a relapse.

"So I bucked up, and went out and sounded round the ship. To my astonishment I found she was tight as a bottle, all but the forward hold—that was full up, sixteen feet in it.



Evidently the bow had taken all the trouble, crushed flat the coral pinnacles, and left a bed of coral *débris* and sand for the ship's bottom to rest on. She was hardly likely in that latitude to get a stronger blow than that of last night; so, for anything I could see, she was there till the Day of Judgment. And equally, of course, so was I too.

"Things being as they were, the commissariat was now my chief interest in life, so I turned to seriously and took stock. And I know you'll hardly believe me, Mr Irwin—indeed, it paralysed me at the time—but it's a fact, that if the *Druid* had not gone ashore when she did, her crew would have been eating one another in two days—that was judging from the amount of provinder I could lay my hands on; and you can bet your little pile that not so much as a sprouting pratie or a mouldy pantile escaped my inventory.

"What was two days' chow for thirty men was a bare two months' packing for me: ye will observe the outlook was not bright. But it takes something to down me, Mr Irwin—as my worthy shipmate here, Mr M'Arravy, can testify. I'm a man to be depended on; and that's a fact—isn't it, Jock?"

"It *is* a fact, Mr Maguire," the small man concurred, with unexpected fervour. "At meal times, or when there's free drinks about, ye can always be depended on."

This was evidently not quite the answer Maguire looked for, and a bootless argument would surely have ensued, had not Irwin introduced the decanter. Followed the usual procedure, and then :

"Of course, there was always the beer—and beer is meat and drink," Maguire continued. "So it was my duty to myself to get at it; for I ask ye what prospect had I of being taken off the wreck within a reasonable time? So I started work, and in two days I had discharged enough of the boots—lucky it was for me they were in small cases—to come at the barrels. And it was then, when I had uncovered them, and was considering them, with the water lapping about between the rounds of them—for it was the forehold they were in—that my great scheme came to me; and I let a howl out of me that ye might have heard in Honolulu. Not to keep ye in suspense"—only a man of Maguire's powers of imaginative sympathy could have credited us with any such emotion—"I saw my way

to salve the ship by help of the beer barrels. Ye know the theory—it's ould as the hills. And I had ample rise-and-fall to work on, and everything convenient for practice. All I had to do was to empty the barrels, bung them up tight, and pack them back again; and when I had enough in place to lift her bow, the first spring tide would float the ship off. I ask ye all, as gentlemen of the cloth, what sea-going engineer worth the name but would have had a try?

“For a time I was uplifted with conceit of this my fine new idea. Then it struck me—what was I to live on when I had spilt all the beer? and I came down suddent. The two months I was provisioned for wouldn't serve to do a quarter of the job I contemplated. So I thought, and I better thought; and I figured and I calculated, all the best part of one mortal melancholy week, till I was nigh-hand crazy; and this was how I settled it. By all the laws of stability that great Irishman, Sir William White, ever knew—and a many he has forgotten—the lifting power of two hundred barrels was required to float her nose off the reef. One hundred I would empty right away. The other hundred

I would live on while I restored the empty ones, and jettisoned the cargo in the 'tween decks. And, of course, after the first hundred were back in their places I would continue with the second hundred, as I got through with them. Not to make a hog of myself, I cut my allowance down to five gallons a day; and it turned out I had struck the quantity to a T—Y. Ai-ee-yah! it was the best Milwaukee, and drank like mother's milk.

“All the same, after I got the first hundred stowed and settled down to drink her off, as ye might say, it was a slow business. And not a sign of a ship, not so much as a smoke on the horizon, did I ever clap eyes on. And divil the living hate had I for company, barring an occasional molly-hawk, or a school of porpoises turning over and over amongst the reefs. Two years and a month to the day it was before the *Druid* gave a sign that the barrels were affecting her. One hundred and ninety-five barrels were then in position; so I calculated to let well alone, and wait for the next spring tide. So on the great day there was I standing by, with steam up on the main, the anchors out of the pipes—and all on springs. For I

was the commander on the high and lofty bridge, *likewise* the mate on the fo'c's'le-head, *also* the man at the wheel, *as well as* the engineer of the watch, *not to mention*——"

"—'The midshipmite, and the bo's'n tight, and the crew of'"——interjected Irwin.

"—*Of the Druid Hall*; so it was up to me to get a move on. As soon as I felt her lifting I put the engines slow astern, gave them a dose of oil and my blessing, and climbed on to the bridge. For five minutes she hung there all a-tremble, fairly in a swither as to what to do. Then she indulged in an extra spasm, and off the reef she slid, gently as a tallow candle out of a tin mould. When she had way enough, I shot down below and stopped the engines. Then I upped on the fo'c's'le and dropped the hook, and there lay the *Druid Hall*, all afloat, safely anchored in five fathoms. It's Saunders Maguire was the big man that day. Was I not justified, Jock?" And the narrator brought his mighty hand down with a resounding smack on the knee of his subordinate.

"I hae doots," said Mr M'Arravy coldly, moving away from his Chief along the settee. "Ye had a good thing on, and ye chucked it away."

For a great man Maguire had his chorus under singularly poor control. For a moment Maguire glared at him; then the wrath faded out on his face, and remained only a great sorrow.

“Yes, Mr Irwin, Jock’s in the right. The good thing I had on was chucked away; but not through fault of mine—mind ye that, now! I did nothing farther that day; and, as I live by bread, the first thing I clapped eyes on next morning was a small, white, Yankee man - o’ - fight anchored in blue water outside the reefs. Then I danced on the deck for joy; here, surely, was help to navigate the old *Druid* to home and beauty.

“They sent a boat across, and half an hour later I stood before the commander. I told my story—but short and circumspectious, for I saw he was a short-grained stick—and asked him for six men—just six of his worst scallywags—and a navigator.

“‘And is it likely,’ says this long slab of a thing that called itself an officer and a gentleman—‘is it likely I’d be after risking a navigator and six of my men to salve an old tramp, and a cargo of mouldy ammunition boots? It’s the boot I’d get myself from my

government,' says he. 'Manila Bay is chock-a-block full of just such old traps,' says he. And then, 'Get the ship underweigh!' he orders.

"At that my heart turned to water. 'At least put me back on board the *Druid*, Captain; for God's sake, put me back!' I cried. Yes, gentlemen, I even pled with him.

"'I've lost too much time already. Pull up that boat, men!' says he to the Jacks at the falls.

"Then I turned on him. 'Captain,' says I, 'I've heard of Farragut, and I've heard of Porter—they were men; what ye are,' says I, 'I will not insult the sacred atmosphere of Uncle Sam's quarter-deck by telling ye. I'll even leave it to your—your indigent imagination,' says I, putting my hands in my pockets and my nose in the air.

"'Take that man below decks!' he sings out, white as a dish-clout; 'and don't let me clap eyes on him till we get to Manila.' And so, two marines assisting, I came expeditiously to a little berth off the men's deck. And through the port-hole I had my last view of the old, despised, deserted *Druid Hall*—and it was not

cheering—just two sticks and a funnel over a rusty, red smudge of hull, all lonesome away on the burnished blue of the Pacific.”

So the narrative came to a close in a key of gentle melancholy. With thoughtful sympathy Irwin passed the whisky. The great man filled, drank, rose, and held out his hand.

“I bid ye good-night,” he said. “I have spent a most improving evening on your ship; and if ye could find time to look me up on mine I would be honoured. In the meantime, I’ll save ye trouble with our friend; I’ll even see him safely over his gang-plank. The laddie’s not used to company.” Then he looked pointedly at me. I scorned the insinuation, but there was no escape.

So together the three of us toiled across the ordered confusion of the great shipyard, that a big, tropic moon now made light as day. Maguire stalked somewhat apart, in a fine silence, and with the glow on his face that is only granted to such as produce the world’s masterpieces. He came first to my gangway, and planted himself in the mouth of it.

“Ye have a fine old ship,” he said, considering her.



"I have. You've seen her before," I replied shortly—the hour was late.

"You carry passengers, too," he said, still considering.

"Of course. Good-night, Saunders," said I. I knew the slightest encouragement would be fatal.

"Then ye'll have a 'bar' on board," he said, and set one foot to the ladder.

"It closes at eleven—Good-night," I yelled ; and, making a desperate effort, I dived underneath his arm, and fled up the gangway.

## THE LAST OF THE *CASSANDRAS*

THE romance of the sea is dead. Our best authors have said it—all but one, and he is a voice crying in the wilderness, and must needs label his splendid fancies “matter of fact.” Romance afloat, we learn, depends on the presence of so many yards of canvas, so many coils of Manila rope, so many feet of timber standing on end. Romance fled before that villain Steam; before Steam and her servitors, marine engineers—a sad race, a race of Gradgrinds, a race bred and fed on facts, facts of steel and iron : men wanting imagination, scoffers at tradition, undistinguished in dress, with an unseamanlike regard for their stomachs, and a fatal fondness for dying in bed of senile decay. Romance!—why, they tell you that to-day the sea herself is but a great, grey plain cut by steamer routes as is the

land by railways. They will not have it even that there are sea-scapes now. The sun that sets in Indian glory over the polished rail of the racing P. & O. is pale and poor beside the orb that flamed beyond John Company's lumbering stern. Tropic nights of magic are of the past. They are buried with Marryat and Michael Scott — and for aye. There are no more great gales, no more direful doldrums. There are no more wrecks, foundering, strandings, derelicts, barratries, piracies, smugglings; no more treasure islands, phantom ships, desperadoes, deep-sea mysteries — no more: no, nor can be again, say those that ought to know. So we poor devils who write of the life at sea—because we know none other or none worthier—are tied, perforce, to telling the artless truth in plain tales.

The account of that voyage, while he was yet full of it, I had from Goodchild—a slow, solid Englishman, without gift of narration, or even desire or affectation of the gift. But first falls to be told a little of the story of the ship and of the man anterior to Goodchild's experience: a knowledge Goodchild knew I possessed, and so deleted all reference to previous happening to an extent that must

have made his bald, inferential yarn entirely unintelligible to an audience who knew not what I knew.

In the early 'seventies the *Cassandra* was the crack ship of the Eastern Oceanic Company. These were the glorious days of the China tea trade, with freights at ten pounds, or more, a ton: and when a ship not seldom netted her value on one voyage from Hankow to London. For twenty years she served, and for twenty years her owners knew not what it was to have her overdue, nor in the casualty list, nor yet in the repairer's hands. Then one black and hellish night of typhoon and terror in Hong-Kong harbour she was cut down at her moorings by a sailing ship; and went to the bottom, taking with her all her company but two—a deck hand and Andrew Dark. She was refloated; but her owners had soured on her—her day was done. Ceylon had vanquished China's teas in the European market, and the old ship's contracted holds could not compete with the modern floating warehouse in carrying general cargo. So she was sold to the Celestial Coasting Company, and blossomed into the *Pekoe*,

and ran Foochow teas to Melbourne in the season, and China cargoes and coolies on the Coast out of it.

The man, as I remember him, was of spare build and stooping, with perfectly white hair and moustache, badly pock-marked, and with the sallow complexion pertaining to men of the engine-room; weary blue eyes and a reserved manner. He looked sixty, and may have been forty-eight. He was given to starting distressfully if spoken to suddenly, and when hurried he developed a painful stammer. He kept greatly to himself, was unpopular and somewhat derided by his younger shipmates, and, of course, was credited with drinking in secret. Whatever of truth was in the accusation, he passed five years as Third in various ships of the C.C.C., and no man could ever swear to his being in drink when at sea, or when in port during working hours. He refused all promotion; and his only ambition seemed to be to smoke as much full strength Navy Cut as any other six men, and spend more hours of the twenty-four than was believable in his own company. Truth to tell, he was allowed to live his life as pleased him with but small interference; for all the

Coast knew his story, and judged he could not well have been other than he was.

For Andrew Dark had been Chief, ay, and Superintendent, in his day: Chief of the *Cassandra* when she was a crack ship, and Superintending Engineer of the Eastern Oceanic Company. A few brave years, then he lost his position, and disappeared for something over a decade from the ken of the Eastern shipping community. And when the hiatus was filled in he cared for no man's opinion; and the laying bare of his tracks told once more what a little world it is to such as follow the sea. When he came East again it was as Third of the ship he had once been Chief of; his old employers had given him a chance for the sake of the man they had known. Two years later came the typhoon; and with the others of his department he had remained "standing by" in the engine-room till the ship went down. And these men, to whom life was yet worth living, had been taken; and he, Andrew Dark—the failure, the friendless, the man whose heart was dead—had been spewed up from among his betters, to be salvaged by fishermen with other flotsam when the storm was spent. The mortal remains of the

*Cassandra's* company were laid in Happy Valley, where the grey granite is graven with their names in the rotation of the ship's articles ; and the sole survivor—the deck hand was knifed in a sailor-town scrimmage a week after the wreck—entered the employ of the C.C.C. For five years he served, and then again Fate placed him Third of the *Cassandra*, now the *Pekoe*.

I met Goodchild wandering lonely in the English Club, in Callao—of all places on earth ! The *Pekoe* had come across the Pacific with coolies—ten thousand five hundred miles without a stop : a trip the old China Coaster seemed painfully certain had been visited on him for his sins. Ten minutes sufficed to bring our knowledge of one another down to date ; then I handed him over to Maxwell, and for two hours, with short but frequent breaks for sherry-and-bitters, that ancient of golden tongue and lurid memories held the newcomer with yarns of the West Coast. He spoke of revolution, and plot, and counter-plot ; of the Chilian war, when quarter was neither given nor asked ; of the three days' fighting in the streets of Lima when the Peruvians used their dead for barricades ; of

encounters with smugglers among the dizzy precipices of the *Cordillera*; of long-dead generals and heroes with comedy-opera names like Alejandro Herrero and Ricardito Moreno, who had once been plain Sandy Smith of Paisley, N.B., and Dick Brown of Bristol Port; of the maze of intrigue and bribery that is Peruvian politics to-day; of ventures among the wild and superstitious miners of the mountains, and life on the sugar fields and *estancias* of the plains; of railway and land swindles—of fortunes made in a day, and gambled away in a night; of the power and wealth of the Church; of the Norther, that dread and sudden wind, the terror of West Coast shipmen; of the bull-fights, the tobacco, the wine, the women of the land: indeed, there was unfolded to the wondering Goodchild the garish, blood-and-gold-bespangled page that is Peruvian story, and by one who for forty full years had lent a hand to the making of it.

The three of us dined together; and then followed our coffee on to the open balcony that gives on the water-front. It was a seasonable night, clear, mild, and just sufficiently bracing. To our right a black, ragged tangle



of masts and funnels stood up between us and the still faintly-luminous West ; to our left the sombre bulk of San Lorenzo Island blocked out the horizon ; and in front of us the glancing dark of the Pacific stretched unbroken to the dim line that swallowed the plunging stars. For a time the night held us, and we smoked in a silence of well-fed content. Then speech came to Goodchild ; and thereafter, in this the Far West, our talk was all of the Far East—of shores, and ships, and men we had known ; and for a space Maxwell had no part in it. And if the listener learned nothing else, he must at least have learned that the happy home and hunting-grounds of the man with the past, the man without a future, the “ dip,” the dead-beat, and the born-tired, is that strip of dented coast and island-starred sea from Singapore North to Vladivostock. So, by way of many strange characters, and a steady consumption of his own mild Manillas, Goodchild came to his story.

“ . . . One of the record queer cases . . . quite remarkable . . . must have been mad . . . said he didn't drink as a regular thing . . . probably a liar . . . certainly indulged in ‘ periodicals.’ I'm talking of a miraculous old

bird I had for Third last trip, when the *Pekoe* ran tea to Melbourne."

A long pause, while he sought inspiration from the glowing end of his cigar.

"It was like this, gentlemen. The Little Great Man came to me two days before sailing.

"'I'm sending you a new Third,' said he.

"'The man I have suits me, sir,' I answered him. 'I hate changes.'

"'Not more than I do, Goodchild,' said he; 'nevertheless, I'm sending you the Third of the *Dragon*.'

"'Not that old fraud!' said I, without thought.

"'Why, what do you know about him?' he snapped back.

"'Oh, nothing, sir, but by repute,' I hurried up and answered; for there was a rasp in his voice that made me feel as if I was walking on plate glass.

"'Well, I'm minded to give the poor soul a chance for the sake of the time—twenty years ago, Goodchild—when he was a better man than I was. I've tried him with Crosshead—but there, you know what *he* is!—but, of course, I can trust him with you, with every certainty

that he will be justly——' and so on ; but you know the Little Great Man's way as well as I do. So, before I knew where I was, I had promised to take this wretched old drunk—for that, mind ye, was his name on the Coast—and treat him as my long-lost brother."

"Did I know him? what was his name?" I here interposed.

Goodchild considered. "I expect you did. His name was Dark—Andrew Dark," he said, in his slow way.

"What—old Dark! Of course I knew him. Drive on your yarn!" The name called the man's story to mind as I have given it.

"Stay a moment, Mr Goodchild, and pardon the interruption," said Maxwell. "The name Dark is not a common one. I wonder if by any chance he was a spare man, with grey hair, and badly marked by small-pox?"

"That sounds like him," said Goodchild dubiously ; and the extended stare he gave Maxwell said as plainly as words : "What can you know about Dark? he was never in Peru."

"Er—would be to-day," continued Maxwell, "a man about fifty, and had been Chief, and even Super, I believe, in a line of home steamers in the China trade."

"The very man," chorused Goodchild and I, in wonderment.

"Then, gentlemen, for something like ten years your Andrew Dark kept a sailor's grog-shop here in Callao, in Jibboom Street."

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" groaned Goodchild; "so it was in Peru he buried himself after he was fired from the Eastern Oceanic Company. A sailor's pub! No wonder he kept his head shut about his past!"

"He got into trouble with the authorities, and the Consul called me in, thinking I might like to help one who claimed to be an engineer. Between us we pulled him through, and the Lodge—he had the hundred - and - thirtieth degree, I remember—paid his passage home."

"Ay, ay, to think of it!" sighed Goodchild, the sympathetic. "Poor soul! From Superintendent to drawing beer for tarry sailors, and living on the Lodge—I can understand why he drank."

The big man subsided into a sorrow-laden silence, and sent clouds of blue smoke into the dark beyond the balcony rail. A minute, and he took up the thread of his discourse; and it may seem strange that neither of these men made it matter of remark that here was

Goodchild dragged ten thousand miles across the Pacific manifestly for no reason but to meet the one man on earth able to fill in the blank in Andrew Dark's story. It was no oversight; but merely that they were wanderers, citizens of the world, men to whom Fate's vagaries were but the commonplace and trite of life.

"Dark joined the *Pekoe* in Hong-Kong, painfully sober and respectable-looking: you may remember drink never affected his appearance, if it did his mind. On the run up to Foochow, nothing happened. After leaving there, but while still in the Min River, I heard something blowing badly, and went below. I found the intermediate gland leaking fit to scare you out of the engine-room, and the Second cursing till all was blue.

" 'I think you told me Dark was a reliable man—look at that!' he cried, when he saw me.

" 'I told you he was a man of experience, my son,' said I, thinking to cool him off.

" 'Experience in loafing—you're right there! He's a bally old sodger,' says he. 'I gave him that gland to pack, and he killed the

three days we were in Foochow over it—half an hour's work! After what you told me, and seeing he was an old man, I did everything I knew to make it easy for him. I even cut the packing for him—six turns—and all I left for him to do was to put them in their place. And he stuck two turns in the gland—and the other four he flung up the tunnel: I came across them just now when I was up looking at the stern gland. I have my own idea of the amount of reliance you can place in a man that needs four bottles of beer for his breakfast. If it hadn't been for what you told me about him, I'd have put a head on the old fraud.'

"I soothed the Second down, and for some days things ran as usual. Then one night he came to me—in the Malucca Passage it was. . . ."

Goodchild mumbled on, but to me for a space his words were but sound, signifying nothing. It was night, but twenty years ago, and the ship was gliding over the lake-like sea of the Eastern Archipelago, and away in the silver starshine floated the soft blue shapes of the dreaming Isles of Spice. A waft of air, savoury with the tang of wet

earth, the pungency of wood smoke, and the faint, sickly - sweet odours of tropical fruits and flowers came to us from the land—came to us two alone, with the stars and our love on the poop of the old *Mandarin*; and again I felt her dear, dusk, rebellious hair blown across my eyes. She laughed up at me, and I stooped and—— But avast!—this is not a love-story. Also, a year ago I met her son, an Edinburgh medical student, and a sad young rip, if ever I knew the breed.

“ . . . ‘deblo,’ the firemen say, ‘and there’s going to be trouble. You know what John Chinaman is, better than I do. The fact is, Dark’s ways are too much for them. It seems that lately he has started calling them by the names of his old watch—the men that went down with the ship in the typhoon. His talking so much to himself got on their nerves bad enough; but giving them dead men’s names, and men drowned in this very engine-room, has scared them all to fits. So they swear he has “deblo,” and I’m sure I don’t wonder at them. His watch is fairly in a state of mutiny; I wish you would speak to him.’

“I promised; and that night, thinking it

best to see and judge for myself, I went below in the middle watch. Dark was on the starting-platform, with his eye on the gauges; sullen as usual, but sober and sensible-looking as you or I. You may well believe I felt clean beat as to how I should break the ice. To hint at your doubts of a man's mind is not a thing to be tackled lightly, especially when he looks as sane as Dark did at that moment. But in a little, the man himself gave me the opportunity. For a time I talked, and he grunted back, in a way he had, but always with his eye on the oiler, as befitted the engineer of the watch. Then all at once he shouted out to the greaser: 'That's oil enough, Harry Black.' The scowl old Ah-Wong threw back at him showed how he appreciated being fitted with a dead man's name. So then and there I got on to Dark, and spoke to him of the folly of doing anything likely to run foul of the superstitions of the Chinese crew. And he passed it off as being a habit he had got into; and was at one with me in all I said; and I left him convinced he would give no more trouble, at least in that direction. And, sure enough, it was a crazy thing to do.



"We arrived at Melbourne, and there we had Christmas. On Christmas Eve Dark came to me, said he understood to-morrow was a holiday, and could he have the day to himself to get drunk——"

"Eh—what the devil!—you're bluffing," said Maxwell, evidently staggered.

"Not me, sir. I'm giving you this exactly as it took place. It's not the first time I've had the same request preferred, either. It wouldn't seem so funny if you'd sailed the China Coast for twenty years. If you don't believe me, ask our friend."

Maxwell questioned me with his eyes. "My mistake, Mr Goodchild," he said; "indeed, it must be the great Coast to sail on. Kindly proceed with your story."

"On the afternoon of Christmas Day I was paralysed to hear a voice giving orders in the engine-room. I went on deck, and found the Second and a couple of the mates standing by the engine-room door, and all on the grin. 'It's that old fool Dark,' said the Second; 'he's got his official jag underweigh, and fancies he's on watch, or something.'

"A little later Jimmy Runcorn, Chief of the Company's *Kwenlung*, came aboard, and I

took him below to show him my new idea in feed-water filters. And there was old Dark still bossing about the engine-room—looking anxiously at the steam gauges, blowing through the boiler glasses, examining the oil syphons, flying about like a paper kite, and all the time singing out orders to invisible oilers and long-dead firemen. I tell you it gave me chills to listen to him. Neither in his set face, nor in his movements, was any sign of drink; nor did he seem to see Runcorn and me gaping at him from the foot of the ladder.

“‘Almighty! What’s his game? Is the man mad?’ said Runcorn, below his breath.

“I gave him an inkling of the trouble, and we stayed on watching. I tell you it was a strange thing to see a man so completely possessed by a delusion: and to mark the sweat fairly pouring off him, just as if there had been a full head of steam on the boilers instead of the fires being dead out, and everything stone-cold.

“As soon as Dark noticed us on the starting-platform he fairly ran to me. ‘She’s all ready—all ready, I tell you. I’ll take a turn out of her right away—shall I, sir, Mr M‘Gregor?’

“The words came from him in a sort of hoarse scream; and, as I live by bread, the fear of death was frozen in the man’s eyes. I was so taken aback I could get out not one word. It didn’t matter. The maniac was off again on some imaginary duty, and I managed to drag Runcorn through into the stokehold.

“‘Since when was your name M‘Gregor?’ said he.

“‘Heavens above, man! Don’t you understand? The poor demented soul is back in the night of the typhoon—standing by to be drowned.’

“‘Almighty!—you don’t say so. But ay, ay; that’ll just be it, no doubt. But where does M‘Gregor come in?’

“‘M‘Gregor was Chief here when—that night—when she was the *Cassandra*.’

“‘And was drowned?’

“‘Of course. They all were: all but a deck hand and him—Dark.’

“‘Man, man!—it’s most—most uncanny, said Runcorn, staring about him dubiously. I own I felt that way myself. ‘For me,’ he went on, ‘I wouldn’t carry that Dark for no man, Super or no Super. He’s enough to put a

hoodoo on the best ship afloat. *Tch!—tch!*—all drowned, ye tell me; even here, where we are the now.’ And I believe that Runcorn, an Ayrshire Scotsman, would hardly have been surprised if the ghosts of the old ‘home’ firemen and trimmers had walked then and there in the stokehold. I never heard of an engine-room ghost, but I don’t exactly see why the engine-room should always be debarred that distinction. The dynamo was not running; and but a poor, glum twilight fell through the gratings. For myself, I swear I was just primed to see things; and as for Jimmy R——, it’s always been my opinion he did. I know when we came on deck he was white as a sheet, and I don’t suppose I was any better. We came up by way of the stokehold; the fact is, we felt no hankering to intrude again on Dark and his ghostly crew.

“‘Regarding that “smile” you spoke of before we went below,’ said Runcorn: ‘if you’ve still some good in your mind—well, I don’t care if I do.’ And, indeed, we were outside more than one second mate’s nip before we felt thoroughly OK.

“Of course, next day, and, indeed, at various times during the trip, I talked to Dark like a

father; but where was the use? The man wanted not for brains; he knew himself and his weakness better than I—or any one but his Maker. We do such things as a duty; but, bless me, if I don't think that generally they were better left undone.

“With the exception of an unofficial drunk in Sydney, Dark was on his good behaviour right back to Hong - Kong; and during the long, sweltering drag up the Australian Coast and through the Islands, I was astonished to see that he picked up a bit—came out of his shell, as it were, and seemed on middling good terms with his shipmates; astonished I was then, but glad now, because of what came after. We sighted Waglan Light shortly before midnight, but there was a fine moon, and I knew our old skipper was bound to go right in, tie up to the buoy, and be done with it. So I stayed on deck; where was the use of turning in only to be yanked out at the Stand-By bell? Eight bells went; and I said to myself: ‘It’s Dark’s watch arriving. He may be all right, but it won’t do to chance it. I’ll take a look at him to make sure.’ So by - and - by I stepped below.

“He was standing on the starting-platform in

the full glare of the light. He did not notice me coming down the ladder; so I took time and observed him carefully, and it seemed to me I had never seen the old man look anything like so well. And when I stepped up to him he turned to me, bright and cheery as certainly I never remembered him before. Till that night he had mostly confined himself to the 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' of the junior engineer; and, indeed, answered in such a way as gave you to understand that although he knew he was the old, drunken, chronic Third, retained on sufferance and for old sake's sake, he yet wanted none of your patronising. But that night he talked as he must have done twenty years ago, when he was somebody—and a gentleman. He seemed to have shed a good ten years of his age; at times he even smiled.

"So we talked of ships, the cracks of their time, the 'homes afloat' of the old low-pressure days, long since turned into hulks or flung on the scrap-heap; and of skippers, mostly the comedy-autocrats of the wind-jammers fallen on the uncongenial environment of steam; and of chiefs, the obstreperous, ancient 'shovels' of the tallow kettle and

service ticket period—now all gone and, but by patriarchs like us, forgotten. So we worked nearer the present, till at last, like an ass, I spoke of the *Cassandra*. With the word I saw the light die in his eyes, and him fall a-brooding. I knew my mistake, and made haste to talk of something else, and he let me talk on. For a time he stood with face turned away; and when at last he looked at me he was a changed man, and there was the dead glaze on his eyes of that Christmas Day in Melbourne.

“‘All hell was loose that night,’ he said; and I knew that he had heard not a word I had spoken since that ill-starred name. ‘Old Mac came to me in his pyjamas. “Andra,” said he, “go below, and get her ready. Like as not, we’ll be wanted to ease the cables.” I went below. I was by the main injection—over there. There was a shock; and then over she went, over and over till I thought she was going for good. But she righted; and they came sliding down the ladder: first George Thompson, the Second—he had been married the week before we left home; then young Dan Sorley—premium apprentice of John Elder’s—the Fourth; then old John

M'Gregor, in his pyjamas, with his white hair, and the long beard of him buttoned inside his jacket. Somebody said she had been run into by a sailing ship; but that she was all right—yes, she was all right.’”

Goodchild paused, and threw away his cigar. “It was damnable: like a man talking in his sleep,” he said fractiously. “The cursed soulless voice of him, too; I knew I was going to be let in for a confidence such as no man has a right to inflict on a shipmate, and such as no man in his senses would. I’ve lived—I’ve *sailed* with men—plenty of ’em—who had come through just such nightmares, but you’d never have known it from their talk. They had decency; Dark—he had none. But then he was mad; must have been—mad as a March hatter. I say it wasn’t decent, gentlemen; hang it all, every all-fired word of his yarn sticks solid in my gizzard still.”

He gulped down two-thirds of a long sleever-whisky-soda, and when he put the glass down his hand was shaking. It struck me that friend Goodchild’s nerves were not just as I had once known them, and that I ought to speak to him gently on the morrow. For a little he sat staring into the night; then, with a shiver of



his big frame, he swung round on his chair, and took up Dark's recital.

" ' I started the electric light. There was no water in the engine-room. We were all there—the four of us, engineers—yes, and Harry Black, the oiler. " Ring up ! " said old Mac ; " Ring up Stand-by ! " I rung up, and the bridge answered back, and it was Stand-By. And old Mac said " Quite so," and — and we waited. Then the ship took a list—nothing to worry at ; but the skylights to windward flew up, and the roaring blast of wind filled the engine-room. Thompson nodded to Harry Black, and he went up the ladder. But we looked at the telegraph, always at Stand-By — the four of us, engineers — old Mac, in his pyjamas ; and George Thompson, married that trip ; and young Dan Sorley, of John Elder's. George was at the throttle, young Dan was handy to the impulse, I was by the telegraph there, old Mac walked up and down the platform, hands behind his back, as his way was. The ship fell over a little more, old Mac staggered in his walk, gripped a hand-rail, swung round to stare at the telegraph — the telegraph that stood always at Stand-By — and his face was grey and old, and his lips working. But he said

no word ; or, if he did, it was drowned by the howling of the typhoon. So we waited—just the four of us ; for Harry Black—he never came back. Then the ship gave a sort of shake ; and all in a moment over she came, over and over till the engines hung right above us. Then everything seemed to fetch away at once ; and young Dan lost his hold of the impulse wheel, slid away down into the dynamo recess there, and fell and rose and was knocked down again, and was buried by the falling gear—young Dan Sorley, that was premium apprentice of John Elder's. The ladder!—I thought to make the ladder. But the world was turning over. The ladder was upside down. I stood on the side of the ship. Then the light went out, and—the water came . . . '

“For a mercy the *Pekoe's* telegraph bell rung just then ; and, believe me or not, gentlemen, but Dark switched his mind off that last scene, answered the telegraph, and started out to do what was needful without apparent effort or delay. It's my opinion he had lived the story so often he could have recited it in his sleep. So, in spite of his wild talk, I left him to himself, confident that he was to be trusted to work

her into port. And at two-thirty to the minute we were fast to the buoy, and 'Finished with engines.'

"I got into my sleeping-suit, then stepped out on deck for a last cigar. The night was fine, and I was still leaning on the rail staring at the million lights of the town that never sleeps, when Dark came up from below and stood by me. I heard him catch a great breath, and when I turned to him he was staring about him wildly.

"'Oh, my God!—what buoy is this?' he cried; and I told him. He was struck strangely still and quiet; but after a moment: 'There seems to be no getting away from this thing for me, Mr Goodchild,' he said; 'the ship lies now at the very buoy she lay at when she went down in the typhoon.'

"A something in his manner rather than his words chilled me, but I made to try and cheer him—to start him thinking of something else. He was perfectly polite about it, but he stopped me before I had well begun.

"'Thank you, Mr Goodchild; I know you mean well, but it's no use. Five years and two months it is since the *Cassandra* went down, and never a day has passed but that

black hour has come to me, waking or in my dreams. Of course, I know—none better—that if I had been a stronger man, I might not have been thus afflicted. But we do not make ourselves; we are but what we are; and I'm only Andrew Dark—poor, old, drunken, crazy Andrew Dark, that all the Coast laughs at, that came ashore out of the *Cassandra* when better men were taken. You've treated me fairly, Goodchild, and I thank you for it; but I won't trouble you any longer, I'll—I'll leave to-morrow.'

"Then I did a thing, up against all regulations—and even common-sense in his case, if you like—but a thing you may well believe I'm not sorry for to-day. I said: 'Will you have a drink, Dark?'

"As for his talk of leaving—blind bat that I was!—I held that as mere wind, sure to be forgot by the morning. So Andrew Dark and I had our peg together, and I turned in.

"The second engineer called me at four o'clock—just an hour later. 'Get up, sir!' said he; 'Mr Dark——' Somehow I knew what had happened directly I heard his name. Yes, gentlemen, he was gone; over the side—the body was never recovered. So 'Andrew

Dark,' in sharp, new letters, appeared at the foot of the list on the *Cassandra's* monument. And he was the last of them. They're all there now—all told."

Goodchild and I saw Maxwell into the last tram for Lima; it was not fitting that such a genial septuagenarian should go unattended. Then I must needs see Goodchild to the landing-stage; his yarn had left me wakeful, and the night was such that it was pleasant to be outdoors. We walked slowly, in deference to the awful cobble-stones on the water-front. From a corner grog-shop burst in beer-thickened sailor voices the chorus of a music hall success of "yester-year in London Town." A vulture flapped heavily past in the dark overhead. Another of the species, a descendant of the Incas, led his captives—two German deck hands off up-town singing, to the tinny tinkle of a guitar. The night life of the "white man's hell" of the West Coast was all about us; but I saw only a great, green, cloud-crowned mountain the other side the world, and on its slopes a City, terrace on terrace, in creams, and browns, and greys—a City I thought then to see never

again, nor yet the kind hearts dwelling there. So we came to the steps, and Goodchild got him gingerly into his boat. He sung out "Chin-Chin"; and as the boat splashed off into the dark, the man at the oars cried: "*A Dios, Senor Maquinisto.*" I knew the voice for that of Domingo, the most complete rascal and smuggler of all the *barqueros* from Panama even to Magellan Strait—and a special friend of mine. So it was "*A Dios, Domingo; A Dios, Goodchild*"; and also—but that was later, when I stood by my window taking good-night of the sleeping sea on whose further shore lay that dark harbour that held for ever his poor soul-case—" *A Dios, Andrew Dark.*"

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